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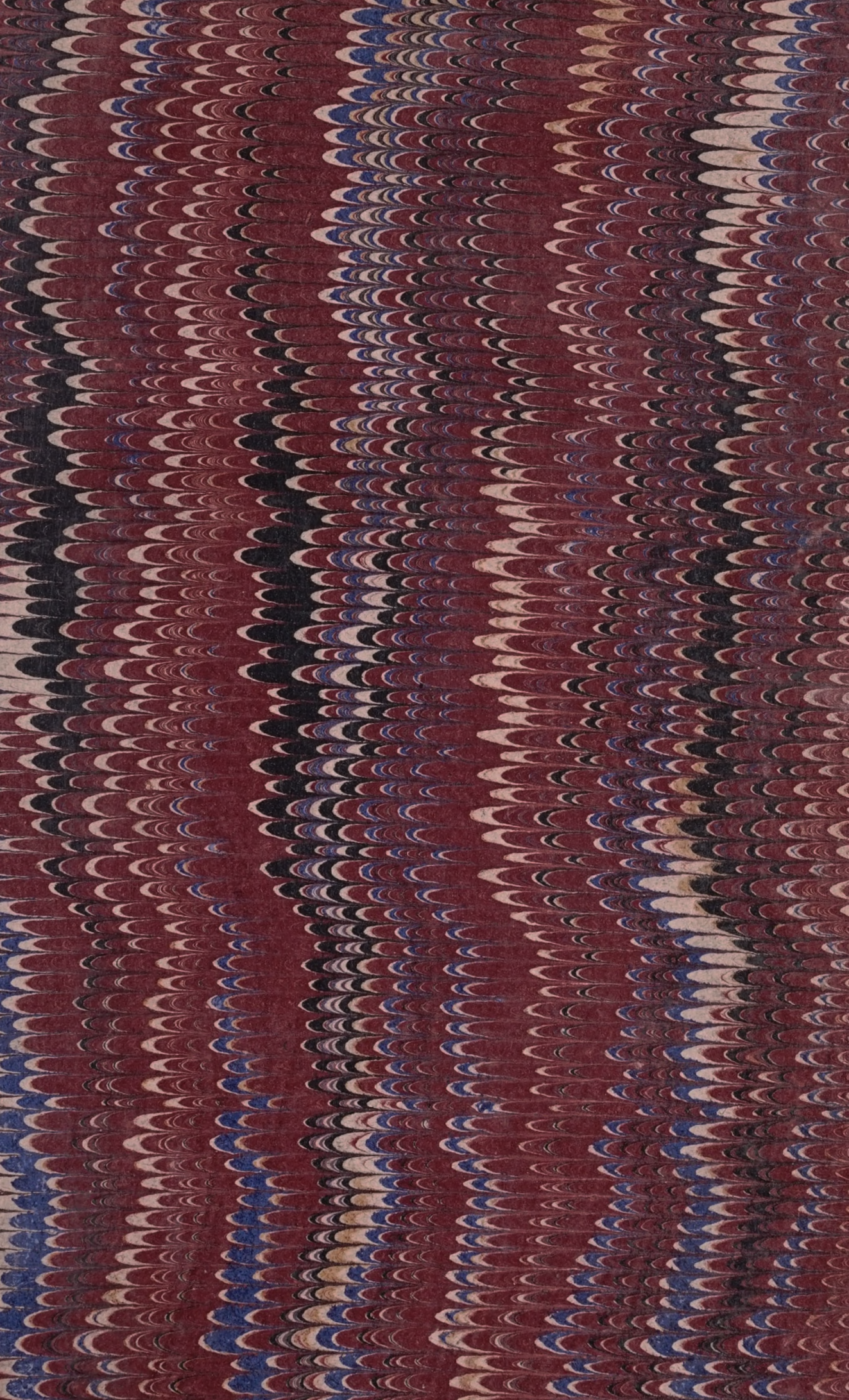
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## ANTOINETTE

MARL-PI

of the

MYSTERY

by

Georges Ohnet,  
Author of

DR. RAMEAU,

Le Maître de  
Forges  
etc.



NEW YORK & ST. LOUIS:  
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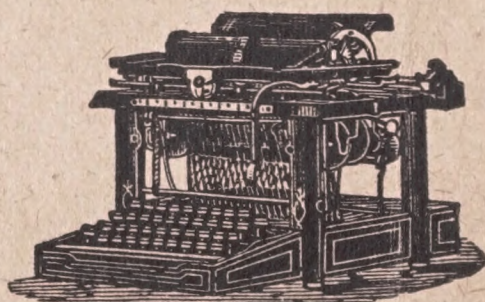
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# ANTOINETTE;

OR,

## THE MARL-PIT MYSTERY.

(LA GRANDE MARNIÈRE.)

BY

✓  
GEORGES OHNET,

AUTHOR OF "DR. RAMEAU," "THE IRONMASTER,"  
"THE COUNTESS SARAH," ETC.

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TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

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THE WAVERLY COMPANY, Publishers,

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# ANTOINETTE.

(LA GRANDE MARNIÈRE.)

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## CHAPTER I.

Upon one of those low-lying lanes of Normandy that wind along the embankments planted with the huge trees that hem in the farms with a verdant rampart, impenetrable by the wind and sun alike, a horsewoman, mounted upon an ordinary looking mare, was leisurely riding one bright summer morning. The reins lay abandoned, and the dreamy rider was inhaling the tepid air embalmed with the clover in bloom. She presented a commanding figure in her black felt hat with its flowing white gauze veil and her long habit of iron-gray cloth. One might have mistaken her for one of those courageous dames, who, in the time of Stofflet and Cathelineau, hardily followed the Royalist army in the trials of La Bocage, and illumined the gloomy Vendéenne epoch with their smiles. She gracefully allowed her lithe, elegant figure to adapt itself to the movement of her mount, absent-mindedly tapping the green stalks of the hedges with her whip. A Scottish greyhound accompanied her, regulating his supple stride to the wearied pace of the horse and lifting towards his mistress, from time to time, his pointed head, from which two black eyes shone under the bristling brows.

The short, thick grass that sprouted under the sombre vault of the beech-trees, spread out before the rider a carpet soft as velvet; the dull cows in the pastures were stretching their noses, tormented by the flies, towards the freshness of the road. Not a breath of air stirred the leaves; the heated air radiated upwards under the rays of the sun and a heavy torpor hung over the earth. With her head bent upon her bosom, the fair rider proceeded on, absorbed, indifferent to the charm of the road so pregnant with shadow and silence.

Suddenly her steed started, sharpened its ears, all but reared upon its haunches, and neighed loudly, while the greyhound leaped to the fore with furious barks, and exhibited to a man who had just leaped into the lane, a double row of sharp, gnashing teeth.



The equestrienne, thus rudely snatched from her reverie, gathered up the reins, got the animal under control, and settling herself securely in the saddle, addressed to the author of all this trouble a look that bore more of astonishment than displeasure.

"I must beg your pardon, madam," he said in a round, full voice. "I very stupidly thrust myself across your path. I did not hear you coming. It is more than an hour since I have been roaming about these pastures, without being able to reach a road. All the gates are padlocked and the hedges are too high to clear. I finally found this little road hidden beneath the trees, and my reaching it has almost caused you a fall."

The rider smiled slightly, and the noble, delicate features of her face assumed a lovely and charming expression.

"Don't worry about that, sir; you are not very culpable, and I do not fall from a horse so easily as you seem to think." And as her hound continued to growl menacingly, she added: "Come, Fox; be quiet."

The dog returned to her side, and squatting himself upon his hind legs, he rubbed his fine nose against his mistress' hand. The latter, all the while caressing the hound, was scrutinizing her interlocutor. He was a man of about thirty years, tall, with energetic face, set off with a thick brown beard. His shaven lip and his tawny complexion, gave him the appearance of a mariner. He was attired in a suit of dark cloth; he wore a black felt hat and carried in his hand an iron-wood stick, better adapted for a battle than a promenade.

"You do not live about here?" she asked.

"I arrived only yesterday," said the stranger, without directly replying to the question which had been put to him. "I was seized with a fancy to take a walk into the country this morning, and I lost my way. These miserable little paths, that seem to lead to nowhere, form an inextricable labyrinth."

"Where do you wish to go?"

"To La Neuville."

"Very well! You are turning your back to it now. If you will follow me for a few minutes, I will set you upon a route where you will run no risk of losing yourself."

"Most willingly, madam; but I hope you will not deviate from your own direction."

She shook her head gravely, and said: "It is not a step out of my way."

The stranger made a sign of acquiescence, and, sepa-



rated from the young woman by the greyhound, which had not conquered its antipathy, and ambled along growling inwardly, he followed the fresh, green opening, without saying a word, but admiring the radiant beauty of his guide. At times, the low branches that hung from the trees barred the way, and the rider was obliged to bend her head to avoid them, and in this movement, her white neck, upon which curled coquettish ringlets, showed itself, and her pure profile stood out sharply against the dark background of the foliage. She bent over gracefully, and drew herself up with such elegant and simple ease, seemingly unmindful of the fact that she was being admired, and, whether through pride or indifference, taking no further notice of the companion whom chance had given her. Her face wore in repose a look of melancholy gravity, as if she were living under the influence of an habitual sadness. What troubles could this young and pretty creature have, created to be waited upon, cherished and adored? Had cruel destiny assigned sorrow to her—to her, made for happiness? She was apparently rich: her trouble must then be a mental one.

Arrived at this stage of his reasoning, the stranger began to wonder if his companion were married or not. Her stately carriage, her rounded figure, the harmonious fulness of which was enhanced by the slenderness of her waist, belonged to a woman; but the velvety softness of her cheek, the unsullied candor of her eyes betokened a girl. The lobes of her rosy ears were not pierced, and she wore no ornament either at her neck or on her wrists.

They had proceeded thus along the lane for about a quarter of an hour, when they came to a heath covered with gorse in flower, over which fluttered innumerable yellow butterflies. On the edge of the common, some sheep were browsing on the dry and scanty grass, guarded by a black dog which began capering about with short, sharp barks of joy when it saw the deerhound. The two were doubtless old friends, for they both started off together on a head-long gallop, the deerhound, light and rapid as an arrow, describing circles around the black dog in its speedier flight. But suddenly the horsewoman gave a shrill whistle, the hound stopped short, looked for a moment at its mistress, and then, accompanied by the black dog, obediently returned.

"But where can Roussot be?" murmured the girl. "Are his sheep and his dog here by themselves this morning?"

As the words left her lips, a noisy burst of laughter



issued from a small clump of birch-trees, and, on the edge of a pool, surrounded by the heaps of linen she was busy washing, as she knelt in a three-sided box half filled with straw, they saw a pretty girl with whom a red-haired youth wearing a gray linen smock-frock and a large straw hat, which was slipping down his back, was roughly romping. He had caught the girl by the shoulders, and holding her down he was tickling her round white neck with a stalk of wild grass, while she, vexed and amused at the same time, struggled and screamed amidst a nervous laugh.

"Will you have done, you bad Roussot! You wait! I'll pay you in a minute with my linen beater!"

But the shepherd did not leave off; on the contrary, he pressed the girl yet tighter in his sinewy and extraordinarily hairy arms. His cunning eyes gleamed, his lips were drawn back in a ferocious laugh, which displayed teeth overhanging like those of a wolf, and instead of saying anything, he only uttered a sort of savage growl. He had forced the laundress quite down amongst the rushes, and was now pushing her towards the water. She, on her side, was no longer laughing, and was beginning to feel frightened, but her cries did not have any effect upon Roussot who, still giggling like an idiot, was now placing his mouth so roughly on the girl's shoulder that it was impossible to say whether he was biting or kissing her.

The horsewoman and her companion paused in amazement before this picture. They had both felt the same vague trouble as they looked on at the half-violent, half-caressing frolics of the two young people.

"That game is beyond a joke," said the stranger; and, raising his voice: "Will you leave off, you vagabond, or shall I have to come and pull you by the ears?" he called.

At these words the laundress raised herself a little, but the shepherd did not seem to hear. The stranger's temper rose, and he was about to address the lad still more roughly, when his companion turned in her saddle, and said to him:

"He is half deaf and dumb—an idiot employed out of charity. Leave me to deal with him."

She leaped the ditch which separated the road from the common, reached the edge of the pool, and, touching the shepherd with her whip, signed imperiously to him to go. Roussot uttered an inarticulate cry, burst into a stupid laugh; then, hurrying away through the gorse and



rushes, rejoined his flock, whistled his dog, and, picking up a whip he had left on the ground, began to amuse himself by cracking it with all his might to arouse the echo of the hill.

The laundress had smoothed out her dress, and crimson with the exertion of the struggle, and perhaps also with confusion at being thus caught playing with the shepherd, but nevertheless looking charming in her disorder and tempting as a ripe wild strawberry, she rose, saying:

"Thank you, mademoiselle."

"You are wrong to let Roussot take such liberties with you, Rose," said the other. "You cannot tell what thoughts might come into his disordered brain."

"Oh, there's no harm in him," answered pretty Rose. "Only he likes teasing people, and he came here to plague me. But, bless you, I'm not afraid of him, and I should have managed to get rid of him by myself; though, thank you, all the same."

And laying a vest on the board before her, she began beating it, and singing in a sweet, clear voice, marking the rhythm of her ditty by the dull thud of her beater on the wet linen, gay and careless as a skylark, her adventure already forgotten; while on the edge of the common stood the idiot, clearly outlined against the azure sky, cracking his whip and still laughing his malicious laugh.

The horsewoman and her companion went on their way. The road skirted a small thick wood, the entrance to which was barred by a high white gate, and as they reached the edge of the plateau they suddenly saw the valley of La Thelle stretched out before them.

On the height to the right stood a chateau built in the Louis XVIII. style and surrounded by a fine park extending to the river, which could be seen glistening between the willows on its banks as it wound between the meadows of emerald green, and which, after passing under a picturesque stone bridge, was hidden at last from sight by some orchard walls. Sheltered from the north winds by the hill, La Neuville basked trim and white in the sunlight, the jagged spire of the church and the high chimneys of the factories rising proudly above the roofs of the houses. A winding road led down to the town, passing, on the left, large and lofty clumps of beech-trees, whose gray trunks and dark leaves gave a somewhat sombre aspect to the landscape; while half-way down the hill, a white hillock, which looked like an enormous mole-



hill, stood out against the woods. The country all around the town was cultivated, and fields of yellow corn, bright green oats and purple clover waved in the breeze right up to the first outlying houses. A clear blue sky stretched over this exquisite panorama which the sun had bathed in a golden flood, and there was an atmosphere of sweet tranquillity about this pleasant place which seemed as though it must be the abode of happiness.

The two spectators of this lovely picture remained lost for a moment in speechless contemplation as they gazed around them in delight. A slight breeze was blowing up from the river, bearing to them the sweet smell of new-mown hay, and they lost consciousness of themselves and each other under the influence of the infinite calm which soothed away all memory of secret care and mental torment.

The stranger was the first to throw off this intoxicating torpor. He struck the ground with his foot, like an exile who finds himself again upon his native land and about to retake possession of it, and with a joyous accent:

"Ah, I see where I am now," he said. "There is La Neuville. That is the Chateau de Clairefont to the right there among the trees, and that hillock below, with the timber-work on the top, is the Great Marl-Pit."

The other made no answer. She was gazing into the distance, in the direction of the excrescence which her companion had just pointed out, and her face had clouded over. She seemed to be anxiously scrutinizing the white mound as if its chalky sides enclosed some mysterious danger. But what cause of alarm could it harbor? There it lay silent, still and deserted, and the lofty beams which crowned it rose gaunt and forbidding as the supports of a scaffold. The girl heaved a sigh, and, replying more to her own thoughts than to the stranger's observation, she repeated in a husky voice:

"Yes, the Great Marl-Pit."

Then, shaking her head as though to dissipate her anxiety, she added:

"This is the road you must take, sir. If you go straight down, it will lead you to the town gates."

"Thank you, mademoiselle," answered the stranger, able at last to admire at his leisure his charming companion, who was now facing him.

He walked on a few steps, apparently hesitating about something; then, bowing:

"May I not have the honor of knowing to whom I am indebted for so much kindness?"



The girl turned her limpid eyes towards him and answered simply:

"I am Mademoiselle de Clairefont."

As he heard this name, the young man involuntarily started, and the blood rose to his averted face. The girl stared at him in amazement, then, as if impelled by some irresistible influence:

"And you, sir," she asked, "who are you?"

A cloud came over the stranger's features, and for a moment he hesitated; then, raising his head, he answered in a low voice:

"I am Pascal Carvajan."

At this answer, Mademoiselle de Clairefont's face assumed an expression of supreme haughtiness; her eyes became cold and hard, her lips curled in a disdainful smile, and with a slash of her whip through the air, as though to draw an impassable line between the young man and herself, she whistled her dog, put her horse to a trot and rode away without once turning her head.

Her companion stood spell-bound, following her with his eyes, and forgetting her disdain to remember nothing but her beauty. She was going away proud and contemptuous after passing half an hour of charming semi-intimacy with him, and perhaps he would never be able to approach her again. He saw the distance between them increasing; already the graceful figure was being hidden from him by the dust raised by the horse's hoofs. The long gray skirt and the white veil floated in the wind; the deerhound bounded along the lower side of the road; then suddenly at the turn where the gate barred the entrance to the wood, rider, dog and all disappeared, and the road was left empty.

For an instant, Pascal Carvajan stood still gazing at the spot where he had last seen the group; then, striking the stones with his iron-wood stick:

"What pride!" he muttered. "When she heard who I was, she did not even bestow on me the glance she might cast upon a beggar on the highway. How well she made me understand that as far as she was concerned I did not exist! Well, fate has willed that we are to be enemies, and yet it throws us constantly on each other's path. Between Clairefont and Carvajan it is war to the knife. It is a pity! She is very beautiful."

Then he looked at his watch and found it was only eleven o'clock, and slowly he began to descend the hill by a little footpath, bordered on either side with gorse. It was a short cut, but half-way down there was a hollow



where the sun beat straight down with nothing to intercept its rays, and the intense heat, concentrated and absorbed as it was by the dry rushes, made a humming in the air as at the mouth of a furnace. Pascal looked round in search of a shelter. At the edge of a scanty clump of birch-trees he saw a red roof, and, hanging above the door, the branch of holly which answers as a signboard at rustic taverns. He bent his steps towards it, and, after crossing a pebbly piece of ground, reached a rough road beside which stood a house with walls newly plastered and shutters painted a fresh green. The front of the house was decorated with a painting of three billiard balls arranged in pyramidal form and two crossed cues, around which was written in large letters: "*Vins, cafe, liqueurs. Repas de Societes.*" On the signboard two men were represented seated at a table drinking, while a jet of foaming liquor was spurting out of a bottle. Beneath, in yellow letters, were the words: "'*Au Rendezvous des Bons Enfants. Pourtois, debitant.*'" Behind the inn there was a little garden with arbors, the centre path of which served as a bowling-ground, while at the back a swing had been erected.

It was here that the working population of La Neuville met to enjoy themselves on summer Sundays. The rooms on the first story were kept for the young people who danced indefatigably to the music of a violin and cornet, while through the open windows the hoarse voice of the master of the ceremonies could be heard crying amidst the joyous shouts and laughter: "Ready for the second figure!" and the noise of the heavy boots moving in time to the music sounded like thunder over the heads of those who were sitting drinking in the rooms below.

Within a few years, Pourtois—who was a big, apoplectic man, stupefied by drink and governed absolutely by his wife, a dark, buxom dame, with a quick hand and sharp eye—had brought his inn into so good repute that the café owners in the town complained bitterly of the competition. Living outside the gates, he had no duty to pay, and thus was able to sell his liquors far cheaper than could his rivals; his garden offered the leafy shelter of its vine and bind-weed bowers to the thirsty customers, and even young men of good society did not disdain a quiet lunch at the little inn.

Every year when the fair was held, Pourtois erected a tent capable of holding two or three hundred people in a field near his house, and gave a ball, admission to which



was free, but where refreshments consequently commanded a good price; and for the last two years political reasons had caused even the corporation of La Neuville to honor this suburban *réunion* with their presence; for Pourtois, who possessed enough influence at election times to make him a personage worth conciliating, had set his heart on crowning his triumph by this official recognition, and in their own interests the representatives of authority had thought it wise not to refuse him.

Moreover, outside his inn he had no ambition. A proposition had been made to nominate him town councillor, but he had declined the honor in words which there could be no doubt had been suggested to him by his wife: "I have enough to do to sell my wine," he said, "and I have no time for speechifying. I will not stand myself, but I will help in the election of my friends," and he had been as good as his word. Thus his inn had become a sort of compulsory meeting-place, where many dangerous words were uttered and much adulterated wine was drunk. In this way, the stout man found himself on the high road to making a fortune; but he did not display any the more pride for that, and he was never above drinking with any carter who might stop at his door for a nip of brandy or a pint of beer, especially if his wife was not there to see; for he was very submissive to his better half, and ill-natured people even said that when Pourtois had tried to assert his rights as lord and master soon after he had been married, she had given him a sound thrashing.

Pascal, catching sight of the inn from the top of the hill, hurried his steps like a good horse who scents the cool water and oats of a halt. He did not recognize Pourtois' narrow, low, tumble-down tavern, with its moss-grown thatched roof, in this large, spruce house with its white walls, green shutters, and red tiles shining in the sun. The signboard and the branch of holly—which were a little out of place on an inn which could, without boasting, style itself a *café*—had alone been left unchanged.

The hill itself looked different. Formerly the whole slope had lain uncultivated, and the common had stretched right over the chalky valley to the boundary wall of the Clairefont park. Many a time had Pascal wandered amidst the gorse below the Great Marl-Pit, which had not then been exploited, setting traps to catch thrushes; but now everything was so completely changed that he could not find one of the traits which had rendered this country so charming in his memory. He found it cut up by roads, sprinkled with houses, open and ac-



cessible to everyone, and all its wildness gone. He felt curious to know if the host would be as changed as the place, and pushing open the inn-door with its panes of frosted glass, he went in.

The room was cool and shadowy, and for a moment the young man's eyes were unable to penetrate the obscurity after the glare of the sunlight outside. Soon, however, they became accustomed to the darkness, and then he saw three men sitting at a table, and behind the counter, which was very high and large, and covered with bottles neatly arranged in rows, a thin, dark woman with a pock-marked face, a square jaw, and a full forehead, from which the hair was drawn in smooth, flat bands. Two of the three men were playing dominoes, and were so intent upon their game that they did not hear Pascal come in. The third looked up to see if the lady was at her post; then, blowing a thick cloud of smoke from his pipe, continued to watch the game. This man was so big that he looked as if he had been inflated, like a gold-beater's skin balloon; his eyes could hardly be seen amidst the folds of flesh, and there was not a hair upon his shiny skin. He was dressed in gray trousers and sleeved waistcoat, and his feet were encased in wool-work slippers, on which was depicted a hand of cards spread out like a fan. His size at once enabled Pascal to recognize him as the phenomenal Pourtois.

"It's your play, Fleury," he said, in a thin, shrill voice, which had a simply stupefying effect, proceeding as it did from his vast chest.

Fleury, who was clerk to the magistrate at La Neuville, was a man of about forty, and possessed a countenance of the most unhealthy and repulsive ugliness. His lips were generally covered with bleeding ulcers, which he dressed with pieces of paper to keep them from the contact of the air, and these pimples, with their white coverings, made his mouth still more hideous than it naturally was, and accentuated its crafty and hypocritical expression. His gray, glassy eyes showed hardly any of the whites, and the balls moved so continually and so quickly that at first they were calculated to inspire a stranger with alarm. His ragged hair was full of matted tufts, which stuck out in every direction, and gave the finishing touch to the horrible expression of his face. He was always dressed in black, but at the present moment he was in his shirt sleeves and without a tie.

His adversary was a strongly-built man of fifty, with gray hair and a very red face. Small gold rings hung



from the lobes of his ears; a pair of yellow leather gaiters reached to his knees, and he wore a wagoner's blouse, smocked at the chest, neck and wrists, while on a chair beside him lay the blue cloth cap with ear-flaps, which he wore summer and winter alike. His hands were nearly as thick as they were long, and strong enough to stun an ox, and when he laughed it was so violently that his cheeks turned scarlet, and he finished half suffocated. He was always called Père Tondeur (*i. e.* shearer), but whether that was his real name or a nickname given him on account of the way he generally treated people with whom he had any dealings, was uncertain; at any rate, ever since Pascal was a child, he had never heard him called otherwise. Pascal remembered seeing him often in bygone times at his father's, and when he went away he always used to say: "Very well, that's agreed," which showed the good understanding there was between Carvajan and him. Tondeur was a timber merchant, giving regular employment to two hundred wood-cutters in the carrying out of the clearing contracts he made with the government and with private individuals.

Pascal had seated himself at a table away from the three men. There was a profound silence, broken only by the buzzing of the flies which were dancing their rounds up near the ceiling in black swarms, and by the sharp click of the dominoes on the marble table. From time to time Tondeur and Fleury uttered broken phrases, and intermixed with the jokes domino players generally indulge in.

"All white—proof of innocence."

"I play the six."

"Well, I follow with the double six."

"And domino! Seven and three—ten, and seven—seventeen, which added to eighty-three make a hundred. Père Tondeur, you're done for."

"Hasn't he luck, that Fleury! He's got mine as well as his own."

"Shall we have one more game?"

"No. I must go up to the clearing to see how my men are getting on."

"Oh, stay here. You'll get a sunstroke if you go out in this heat."

"I shall get a domino-stroke if I stay here!"

The three men burst into a loud laugh, and Fleury was just beginning to shake up the dominoes again when the sound of a carriage stopping before the inn attracted everyone's attention. The huge Pourtois even rose with



a gesture of curiosity, but there was no need for him to disturb himself, for the door flew open before the pressure of a muscular hand, and a tall young man wearing a shooting-suit of maroon velvet and leggings, and looking somewhat excited, entered abruptly.

"You have some people here?" he said, glancing round him. "So much the better. Here, Père Pourtois, just go and look in my trap; you'll find a dangerous animal there belonging to you, which you oughtn't to let run loose in our woods. This time I bring him back to you, but next time, as sure as there is a heaven above us, I'll wring his neck! And I've told him so."

"What, Monsieur le Comte? What?" asked the astounded inn-keeper, deferentially removing his cap. "An animal belonging to me? An animal that you've told—"

"Oh, go out to the carriage and then you'll understand," interrupted the young man impatiently.

Light-footed Fleury was already there. As he looked, his sardonic face beamed, his little eyes twinkled with malicious merriment, his mouth opened in a burst of laughter, showing teeth as dark as cloves; and clapping his hands, he cried:

"Why, its Chassevent, with his four paws tied and looking just like a calf being taken to market! Ah, how happy he looks on his straw! Straw's a capital thing to ripen medlars, but it doesn't make a very comfortable bed for a Christian, does it, old boy?"

A growl like that of a trapped wolf came from the light cart, and supporting himself on his elbows and knees, a man in a patched blouse and trousers with the legs covered with leather, a kerchief tied over his gray hair and his feet shod with wagoner's boots, raised a thin face with oblique eyes and a sinister-looking mouth above the side of the vehicle.

"Do you want to get down, you old rogue?" said the young count, and picking up his prisoner like a bundle of rags he carried him into the inn at arm's length and deposited him howling on one of the tables.

"What muscle!" cried Père Tondeur, with immense admiration.

"But what a sad use to make of it," put in Fleury, whose access of gayety had been calmed by a sudden reflection. "Pourtois, get your wife's scissors and cut these cords. Oh, Monsieur Robert," he went on, persuasively, "is it worthy of a man in your position to treat a fellow in such a way?"

Pourtois' huge hands had already untied Chassevent,



who, finding himself free, sprang to his feet, rubbed his shoulders, and catching sight of a full glass eagerly emptied it.

"It's made the beggar thirsty!" said Tondeur. "But what's he been up to, Monsieur le Comte?"

"He's been setting snares in the Vente aux Sergents. It's the tenth time he's done it within a month. No one could find out who it was, but I suspected it was he, and I went round this morning after the keepers had gone in and caught my fine fellow in the very act. The snares are in my pocket now."

He drew out a coil of brass wire, and throwing it in the face of the poacher, who was very pale and had not uttered a word:

"Here, you scoundrel, here are your instruments of labor; but remember what I have told you! No more *procès-verbaux* with you. You'll be sent before the magistrate and you'll get a week in prison, during which you'll be better fed than you are at home, where your daughter is obliged to pay even for your tobacco; so it will be all profit. This morning I caught you and tied you up and left you at the foot of a tree for three hours, and that is all you'll get this time, but if you play your tricks again—"

Chassevent's tanned face gathered up in little wrinkles which ran over his skin like the ripples raised on a lake by the wind. He did not raise his treacherous eyes, but he gave vent to a scoffing whistle which brought the blood to the young count's face.

"Ah, you vagabond!" he exclaimed, and he had already raised his powerful hand to strike, when Fleury stopped him by designating with a glance Pascal sitting in a dark corner of the room.

"Monsieur Robert, let me beg of you—before a stranger too. There, you must take no notice of his bravado. Chassevent is very wrong; his conduct is most reprehensible, but your method of proceeding is altogether illegal. No private individual has any right to interfere with the liberty of another on his own authority—there are proper agents to perform such tasks as those. It is not the magistrate's clerk who is speaking to you now, it is the man who, as you know, is devoted to you although he deploras the violence which gives rise to false impressions about you."

"The wrong I do myself has nothing to do with anyone but me," broke in the young man haughtily. "The gendarmes busy themselves about everything except look-



ing after scoundrels, and as for you, Fleury, you are a good fellow, but don't interfere with my affairs."

"You should not refuse the loyal assistance of anyone," murmured the clerk, bending his head with an air of sorrowful humility.

"You are not going away without taking some refreshment, Monsieur Robert?" exclaimed Pourtois, obsequiously. "What may I offer you?"

"Nothing, thank you," said the young man, and feeling in his waistcoat pocket he threw a piece of money on the table saying:

"Here, this is for the stable-boy who has been holding my horse."

Then leaving the room without adding another word or bestowing the slightest farewell nod, he climbed into his dog-cart and drove quickly off.

Chassevent had hardly seen him disappear amidst a cloud of dust before he regained the power of speech. All the invectives that had been on the tip of his tongue for the last few moments now flowed forth in a torrent, and he struck the table so violent a blow with his fist that the neglected dominoes leapt on the marble.

"Ah, you dog!" he yelled with rage. "Ah, you great coward! I'll serve you out for this! Just for a few wretched hares did he tie me up, as he told you, to a tree! But he took me unawares, you know, for I'm not afraid of him!"

"Don't brag," returned Tondeur. "He could knock you down with one blow."

"What a thing to do! But next time I'll take my gun, and sure as we are standing here, I'll kill him!"

"Come, come, Chassevent, you are not so angry as you pretend," interrupted Fleury, "and you are only talking nonsense."

"Never will I forgive him for what he has done to me," went on the poacher gloomily. "When it gets about, the whole country-side will laugh at me. Oh, those Clairefonts! When shall we have done with them?"

He uttered a horrible oath, and casting a sinister glance at Fleury:

"Yes, only let Monsieur Carvajan look after the father. I'll answer for the son."

At the mention of this abominable coupling of his father's name with that of this vagabond, Pascal sprang to his feet, and his face crimson with anger:

"I forbid you to utter Monsieur Carvajan's name, you



scoundrel," he cried.

"And why, if you please?" asked Chassevent in a tone at once sneering and threatening.

"Because he is my father."

These words produced an immediate change in the attitude of all three men. Pourtois respectfully drew forward a chair. Fleury pulled down his greasy coat and straightened his crumpled cravat, while Chassevent touched the kerchief which served him in place of a hat. Pourtois' wife herself deigned to smile over the counter between her two white metal cash-boxes.

"Oh, so you are Monsieur Carvajan's son?" said the poacher. "That's a different matter altogether; for, don't you see, Monsieur Carvajan is the man for us, and there's no fear that we should want to put him out. I have never so much as taken a rabbit in his woods at La Moncelle, not but what the place is swarming with them. Monsieur Carvajan! Why, I'd do anything for him. If he wanted my daughter for a servant, he should have her to-morrow, although she is a little proud; but she has a right to be, for she's pretty enough. I went around canvassing for Monsieur Carvajan at the municipal elections, and these gentlemen know how I drank his health the day he was made mayor, drank it as it ought to be drunk in honor of a friend. Ah, I should think I do like Monsieur Carvajan—as much as I hate the people opposite. But he isn't any fonder of them than I am, and he'll rid us of them."

He shook his fist at the hill on which stood the Chateau de Clairefont, half hidden by the trees, and becoming excited again at the memory of his recent adventure:

"Ah, you wretch! To tie me up like a dead crow, hung in a field at the end of a stick! But I'll serve you out for it, or may what I am going to drink poison me!"

And so saying, he emptied at a draught a glass of beer that Pourtois had just poured out for Pascal.

"Look here, Chassevent," cried the angry inn-keeper, "we've had enough of your tales, and we'd much rather listen to the gentleman, whom we are very pleased to see back here again. I knew you when you were quite a child, Monsieur Pascal; many and many a time have you come into my inn when you were out for a walk with that dear, good lady, your mother. Oh, it is very different now to what it was then, but you too have changed, and here you are grown into a fine young man, you who used to be rather lanky—if I may say so without offence."



"You do not offend me," answered Pascal, whose eyes were on the ground as if he were absorbed in thought. "Yes, all is indeed changed—men and things alike."

"And all will be still more changed before long," said Fleury in hard tones. "There is war here between your father and the Marquis de Clairefont, Monsieur Carvajan. It is thirty years since the hostilities commenced, and now they are drawing to an end. The folks up there are ruined utterly, and they haven't a ghost of a chance of retrieving their fortunes; for it is your father who has them in his power. You have arrived just in time to assist at the victory, so let me welcome you, Monsieur Pascal."

And the clerk held out a claw-like hand to the young man, which the latter no doubt did not see, for he allowed it to drop again without taking it.

Standing upright and motionless he pondered, again going over his recent adventure in his mind. He saw a beautiful girl on horseback, riding slowly along under the cool dome of the trees, accompanied by a large deerhound. A stranger jumped down into the lane before her and asked her his way, and gravely and with a proud kindness she acted as his guide. As he was leaving her, he respectfully begged her to tell him her name, and it was Mademoiselle de Clairefont, the daughter of the man who was always spoken of as his father's enemy. Then Pascal fancied that a shadow fell over the girl and that he saw her robed in black, with her head bowed beneath the weight of cruel grief and her lovely face drawn with anguish. She moved along in silence, her eyes, red with weeping, fixed on the ground, and she was all alone as if she were forsaken. The green and flowery road had lost its summer splendor; the trees, deprived of their leaves, trembled, dark and cold, beneath the winter wind, and the whole picture was expressive of misfortune. How was it she was alone? Where was her father? What had become of her brother, the violent and rough young man that Pascal had seen but for a moment? How was it that this adorable girl was left in dreary solitude, and why was she weeping? Was old Carvajan the cause of this mourning and sorrow as these scoundrels had said?

Pascal's heart swelled. Then he anxiously asked himself the reason of this sudden interest in a girl of whose very existence he had been unaware the day before. It pained him deeply to think that she was going to suffer, and suffer through a Carvajan. Would not he, who bore the hated name, be also cursed by her? When, under



the impulse of an irresistible sympathy, he would have wished to throw himself at her feet, to assure her of his devotion and to accomplish superhuman tasks in an endeavor to make himself noticed, he found himself predestined to be loathed and scorned by her.

The old Marquis de Clairefont, the athletic and violent Robert, he had forgotten. He thought of her alone as the unique incarnation of the family; it was her safety alone which was threatened, it was her ruin which was being so joyfully anticipated; she was the victim delivered over to these confederates who were gloating over their approaching victory and congratulating him, Pascal, who already longed to crush them, on his arrival in time to assist at the death.

He raised his head with the feeling that he was being stared at, and he found that the eyes of the men around him were fixed on him, surprised that during the minutes which had followed Fleury's triumphant words, he should have stood mute and abstracted. He passed his hand over his forehead, and eager to know more of the plot which was being hatched against Clairefont—

"I thank you for your welcome," he said, forcing a smile, "but let me tell you that I come from a land where the interests which are prompting you would seem petty in the extreme. I have traveled over the wildest and least civilized parts of America, and seen thousands of acres serving merely as pasturage to innumerable herds guarded by detachments of mounted shepherds; and when in a year's time I again passed through the countries that I had last seen as wildernesses I have found villages which had sprung up as by enchantment. I have ridden over mountains where the roadside pebbles were of silver; I have passed by lakes of petroleum containing enough oil to light the whole of Europe for ten years without being exhausted. I have walked over fields where the vegetable mould was five yards deep and where the corn grows high enough to hide a man standing upright. I have assisted at the marvellous and uninterrupted career of a progress which was transforming a hemisphere. Then I return home after ten years' absence, and here I find you still occupied with the same intrigues, stimulated by the same hatred, consumed by the same desires. It is easy to see that all is definitely ruled, measured and settled in our France and that you have plenty of time to waste. I will assist at your little amusement since you invite me to do so, but I warn you that I am a little *blasé* and I do not promise you that I shall take much interest in the spectacle."



And he burst into a laugh which, to Fleury's ear, had a false ring in it. The clerk felt a little uneasy, and he looked closely at this son who treated with so much scorn a matter which held so large a place in his father's heart. He thought it best to disclose the whole scheme to him so that he should not regard it as of so little importance.

"Here there is no question of petroleum lakes, or silver mines, or even of land which needs no manure," he said with crabbed sarcasm. "We are not in the land of marvels, but in France, where money is rarely easily gained, and where a really good speculation deserves attention and time. Now, the Great Marl-Pit is in question, for this arid hill covered with heath and wild herbs contains millions beneath its surface. Worked by that wool-gatherer, the Marquis de Clairefont, it has been a source of ruin—in the hands of your father and those who are with him, it would be a source of wealth. The whole neighborhood is interested in the estate of Clairefont changing hands, and you would not find yourself uncomfortably lodged if you lived in the chateau up there, Monsieur Pascal. However dilapidated it may be, it is better than the little house in the Rue du Marché."

Pascal walked mechanically to the door and opened it, and suddenly the Clairefont park sloping upwards on the hill-side to the foot of the long terrace which ran along the front of the chateau, appeared before his eyes. The copses lay still, dark and silent, save for the melancholy call of a cuckoo in the distance, and beyond those shady trees, behind those walls was the girl he was already dreaming of protecting. There was a great distance between her and himself—the whole width of this sterile valley in which were hidden the treasures of which Fleury had spoken. But still more impassable was the line drawn by the slender whip which had cut through the air with such a whirr when he had uttered his name, the dreaded name of Carvajan, which to her startled ears sounded like an omen of ruin.

"A beautiful park," murmured Chassevent's hoarse voice behind him, "and a pretty house; my daughter works there and she tells me about it."

"I can see two thousand feet of trees to cut down," added Tondeur, "and then there would be no gap."

"We'll have a go at them, won't we, old Crafty?" said the huge Pourtois. "They want sleepers for the railway; it'll be just right."

"And there are twenty acres or so that we shall know how to flood and turn into some very pretty meadows,"



replied the wood merchant. "Let's live in hope!"

Then, twisting the thong of his whip round his wrist:

"Come, we've gossiped long enough. *Au revoir*, boys. Monsieur Carvajan, your servant."

He gripped his friends' hands, took off his hat to Pascal and walked heavily off towards the plateau.

The young man gazed after him, thinking that, as he went through the woods and along beside the park, old Tondeur might meet, perhaps, the charming rider. Then, his ideas taking another course, he thought anxiously of how the occupants of Clairefont were living surrounded by secret and bitter enemies. Had he not, but a few minutes before, heard Fleury speaking familiarly to the young count? Was not Pourtois smiling, and obsequious to the young *chatelain*? And did not Tondeur, whose business brought him into frequent contact with the marquis, wander over the estate nearly every day, counting the old beeches and the great oaks, and calculating in advance his share of the common booty? Down to the horrible Chassevent, whose daughter worked at the chateau by the day, and served as spy to the dark band of whom Carvajan was the head.

Thus, moment by moment as his father's agents spoke, did Pascal see all the springs of the snare come to light. He wanted to know all, and happening to look up and see Fleury, who was making himself agreeable to the silent and meditative Madame Pourtois, he resolved to get to the bottom of this warped mind. Drawing a silver cigar-case from his pocket, he opened it and held it out to the clerk.

"One can see that you have come from America," said the latter, looking at the havanas with slow admiration.

He chose one, and gnawing off the end, began to blow out the smoke in thick clouds.

"If you are going to La Neuville, we might go together."

"With pleasure."

ed When they were on the road, Pascal threw one last glance at the high terrace where he fancied he could confusedly see the elegant figure of a girl walking; then familiarly taking Fleury's arm, he said with the frankness of a man who feels he can speak in confidence:

"Now we are alone, tell me about these Clairefontes."

"Oh, my dear sir, they are sinking deeper and deeper every day. At the present moment they have only their heads above water, and soon they won't have even that. The marquis is an old fool, who for the last five-and-



twenty years has taken more pains to ruin himself than a good many other people take to get rich. As long as he did nothing but invent ploughs with double automatic shares with which no one could plough, and rotary thrashers which threshed the grain into marmalade, it didn't so much matter. But one fine day he took it into his head to get up chalk by hydraulic power, and then he dug all over his estate, built a factory, and next mortgaged his land to meet the expenses of the enterprise. It would have been better for him if he had thrown himself down the Great Marl-Pit which is a hundred and twenty yards deep. The old fellow is about as fit to manage an affair of that kind, as I am to set up sticks for peas. It wanted some one who knew what he was about to pull it off, and it was to the interest of the very one who could have done it for the business to go wrong."

Fleury winked his squinting eyes, gave vent to a little giggle, then went on:

"Monsieur Pascal, your father is a man it is useless trying to resist, and I would rather be on bad terms with the devil than with him. The marquis knows now what he has to expect, and he must bitterly regret the shabby trick he played Monsieur Carvajan years ago."

Pascal glanced at his companion inquiringly.

"Oh, you were not born. It is a very old tale, but your father knows how to reckon compound interest, and he lets nothing go unpaid."

"But if the speculation you were speaking of turned out so badly, why take so much trouble to get it into his own hands?" asked Pascal.

"Because, properly managed, it would be an excellent one. The lime from the Great Marl-Pit can bear comparison with the best from Belgium; it is better than that from Senonches, and the whole hill which reaches from Clairefont to Lisors is tremendously rich in it. There are millions buried up there and we shall know how to get them out. We shall obtain permission to dig the commons by paying a moderate sum, and people will be able to get as much chalk as they like for more than a hundred years. It means a fortune for all those who belong to the syndicate directed by Monsieur Carvajan—a sure and rapidly acquired fortune!"

Fleury's face was beaming, and he stretched out his hand as though to grasp the riches the future held.

"It means the ruin of the marquis," said Pascal.

"Oh, complete," replied the clerk eagerly. "He must have given up trying to get lime by this time. All his



property is mortgaged, and the mortgage will very shortly be foreclosed by your father, who has advanced large sums to him through other people. The marquis is simply stripped. He's in a nice scrape, the old aristocrat."

"Then hasn't Monsieur de Clairefont anyone to help him with his advice and strength?"

"Well, it wouldn't be his son, the rough, handsome lad you have just seen, who treats men as he does his dogs, when they do anything wrong. Where should he find sense enough to guide his father when he has not enough to govern himself? If it was a question of shooting a boar, of driving a restive horse, or eating or drinking for a whole evening, or of making love to a pretty girl, then you would always find him ready and able. But do not ask him to do any head-work; he could not apply himself to it—he would die of apoplexy if he did not live in the open air. And he is the only man there is in the house, for I do not count the Baron de Croix-Mesnil who only comes every now and then to pay his addresses to Mademoiselle Antoinette."

At these words, Pascal stopped short as if he had seen an abyss suddenly open at his feet. A great pallor overspread his face, and in a strangely-altered voice he stammered:

"Is he her betrothed?"

"Yes. He is a nice young fellow, a captain of dragoons stationed at Evreux, who has been dancing attendance on her for the last two years without getting disheartened, but who will certainly slink off when he sees the plight his future father-in-law will be in."

Pascal breathed again. A horrible hope came into his heart at the thought that Antoinette might be deserted. He saw that his interests were the same as his father's—he could expect nothing save by the ruin of the marquis. Antoinette dowerless was much nearer to him. Then he shuddered as he surprised himself wishing that this disaster might come to pass.

"What a heart I must have!" he said to himself. "Can I be as detestable as this Fleury, who calmly gives me all these details and discounts the misfortunes of this family? Am I going to join their abominable syndicate? Shall I seek to obtain this lovely girl by infamous means?"

He raised his head, stamped his foot on the ground, and, his heart swelling with a bold hope, thus answered the question his conscience had just put to him:

"No. It shall be by my devotion!"



## CHAPTER II.

He who had dared to make so bitter an enemy of Carvajan was now an old man with wrinkled brow, hair white as snow, bent shoulders and faltering gait. When young he had been called "handsome Clairefont," and the implacable hatred of which he was the object had had its origin in a love scrape.

When the present marquis was born in 1816, the Restoration was in the height of its power and brilliancy. His father, enriched by the fortune of his wife—a pretty English woman he had married during his exile—had bought back the ancestral chateau and acquired an estate which brought him in a hundred and twenty thousand livres a years, while the favor with which he was regarded by Louis XVIII.—whose partner he had been at whist for over twenty-five years, from Coblenz to Verona, and from Hartwell to Paris, following the exiled monarch through all his wanderings—had procured him the post of Gentleman of the Chamber and the title of Commandeur de Saint Louis; in fact, few of the faithful soldiers who had spilt their blood before the Republican cannon during the Vendean troubles, received as substantial rewards for their heroism as did Monsieur de Clairefont for the rubbers he had played.

When he was thirteen years old, Count Honoré lost his mother. It was the first real grief of his life and one which would probably have left him inconsolable, had his father allowed him leisure to indulge it. But the marquis did not encourage sorrow which was unproductive of any good results, so he induced his heir to dry his tears, and, to give him some distraction, obtained his admission to the court of Charles X. in the quality of page. Honoré pleased by his graceful vivacity. The Duchess de Berry took a liking to him and deigned to caress the fair-haired boy, and the son seemed destined to the same good fortune as the father. He was, indeed, already learning whist, when the Revolution, which delights to shuffle the cards of men and kings, sent Charles X. post haste to Cherbourg, where he embarked for England. The marquis, whose whole life had been passed in exile, did not think it wise to avoid the dull life which he knew would be so brilliantly rewarded sooner or later, and he, therefore, followed his sovereign to Garitz and commenced to initiate his son into the art, which he knew so well, of wooing misfortune.



This second emigration, the hardships of which were greatly mitigated by the enjoyment of a considerable fortune, lasted much longer than the marquis had thought likely. The younger branch which had been planted on the throne took root strongly, and Honoré de Clairefont, who had gone to the foreign land a boy, grew up there and became a man, and as he grew older, curious dissimilarities showed themselves between his character and his father's.

Just as the companion of the Comte de Provence was frivolous, skeptical and overflowing with the somewhat vicious wit and graces of the eighteenth century, so was the page of the Comte d'Artois generous, enthusiastic and a firm believer in the utilitarian theories of the new epoch. His father, who was ignorant to a truly aristocratic degree, seeing his son's inclination to studious pursuits, laughed at an application which he thought deplorably plebeian.

"For what are you preparing yourself, my boy?" he said to Honoré. "Do you wish to be a mechanic or a tradesman? There is but one science that a man of your rank ought to be learned in—that of living well, and I fear that is the only one of which you know nothing. It distresses me to find you have the tastes of a miserable tutor, for they will give people a wrong impression about you and will hinder your advancement in the world. You must have inherited these ideas from your mother's side—she had some drapers in her family in the time of that rascal Cromwell—for the Clairefontes never studied anything, except how to fence and to spend their revenues royally. Their birth taught them enough about other things."

This sarcasm did not convert Honoré, who found relief in his studies from the dull life he led at the court of the unthroned monarch. He was devoted to physics and chemistry. He had made the acquaintance of an exceedingly learned man, a retired professor of the University of Jena, whose liking he had gained by his attentions, and with him he passed delightful hours in a study fitted up as a laboratory. One morning when a very loud explosion had taken place during an experiment, his father banteringly asked him what it was he was making with so much noise, and as Honoré, who stood in great awe of the marquis, made no answer:

"If it is the elixir of long life that my friend the Comte de St. Germain pretended he possessed, let me have a bottle of it, for I have not felt well for some time."



The young count, feeling uneasy, spoke to his father's doctors, but their care was of no avail, and the marquis died, his only disease being that he was eighty-four years old.

Thus Honoré was hardly of age when he found himself rich, free, and tolerably tired of living in a foreign land. Caring very little about sulking in the *salons* of an exiled prince, and scarcely more than a boy, he returned to France and hastened to see Clairefont once again. The air of his native country threw him into a strange ecstasy, and he felt that he was young and able to enjoy life, which was rather a novel sensation for him. The blood coursed through his veins at an unwonted rate, he neglected his laboratory, and made up his mind to pass the winter in Paris.

The marquis had died a little too soon. If he had seen Honoré gambling and going to supper parties he would have borne away with him the comforting conviction that the name of Clairefont had not descended to a scholarly pedant. The young man joined the Jockey Club, then not long founded, ran his own horses, was well known behind the scenes at the opera, and, as his income was not sufficient for his expenses, cheerfully broke into his capital.

Every summer he passed two or three months at Clairefont for the shooting, throwing La Neuville into a state of stupefied amazement by the style of his carriages and the splendor of his receptions. The most extraordinary tales were told about the fetes the young lord provided for his friends. It was said that eighty bottles of champagne had been drunk at one dinner; that women dressed like men joined in the shooting parties, and that one of them had even lodged some lead in the calves of one of the beaters as she was shooting at a deer. The wounded man had been recompensed for his pain by a gift of two thousand francs—a little fortune! The peasants were deeply impressed, and on shooting days they carefully placed themselves in dangerous places in the hopes of getting a similar windfall.

Honoré was a handsome man, of middle height and with fair hair and very soft blue eyes, and when he drove through the town in his tilbury, the hoofs of his horses making the window-panes rattle again, more than one woman came to the window to peep, and many hearts beat the quicker for his sake. But what was there to hope from an exquisite who was said to have had marvellous luck in his love affairs at Paris and to bind and hold



with the same flowery chains the most celebrated actresses and the proudest court ladies? And yet an event was about to pass which caused an immense sensation in the neighborhood and exercised a tremendous influence over the life of the marquis.

In the Rue du Marché, near the public fountain, the continual sprinkling from which had stained the walls with a greenish moisture, there stood a low and narrow house, with a pointed, slanting gable and sash-windows with green glass bull's-eye panes. Above the door hung a black board bearing these words: "Gatelier, Dealer in Hay, Oats and Fodder." And the little shop on the ground-floor was filled with sacks of grain, while in a vast case which was fastened to the wall, jars of samples hardly ever moved were growing mouldy under the dust. But this damp, dull, little house into which the sun never shone, seemed a bright and luminous abode to the marquis, for one market-day when his carriage had come to a stand-still through a block in the road, he had cast an absent glance at the sombre interior and had been dazzled by the sight that met his eyes. Seated at the open window, her fingers busy with some embroidery, was a young girl, fair as one of Raphael's Madonnas. Her skin was ivory white, her mouth dreamy and tender, her blue eyes were fringed with long dark lashes and there was the delicate, charming grace about her of a flower which is drooping for want of sun and air.

The carts which had stopped the way had gone on, the peasants who were driving their bargains with the aid of much shouting and pounding of fists, had gone to a neighboring inn; the road was clear and the marquis' horses were impatiently pawing the ground. Still their master stayed with his eyes fixed on the window which served as a frame for a picture of such exquisite beauty, forgetting where he was, indifferent to the stare of passers-by, disdaining the remarks of the middle-class townspeople, absorbed in admiration, and ardently longing to get out of his carriage to draw near the girl who had made so deep an impression on him. The sound of a tinkling bell, put in motion by the opening of the shop-door, disagreeably aroused him from his ecstasy, and he glanced regretfully at the dirty street and the old dark house, wondering by what irony of fate this pearl should dwell in such a dust-heap. Then he felt a sort of magnetic attraction—a man had come to the door, and leaning against the door-post, was directing an irritating gaze upon the marquis. Monsieur de Clairefont calmly



examined this impertinent individual from the height of his seat. He saw that he was small and thin, with a sly-looking face, in which shone two eyes possessed of remarkable vivacity. He was dressed like a workman, in a waistcoat of gray ratteen and green corduroy trousers, worn at the knees. As he was still staring at him, the girl raised her head and noticed Honoré stationed before the shop. She blushed, turned away her head, put on an air of indifference, and, leaving her seat, moved to the obscure end of the shop, where the marquis heard her say in a soft, musical voice:

"Finish your accounts, Carvajan, instead of looking into the street."

The clerk shook his head as though to chase away some disagreeable thought, turned once more his threatening face toward the young nobleman, then slowly let go of the door, which swung to with a rattle of its panes. Honoré touched up his horses, and turning to his servant, who was sitting on the back seat with folded arms and impassive face:

"Who is that pretty girl?" he asked indifferently.

"She is old Gatelier's daughter, sir," answered the man. "She is well known round here; her name is Edile, but she is generally called the *belle grainetière*."

"Is she bright?"

"Oh, yes sir. Her father is pretty well off, and if she had ambition she could marry at least a bailiff."

"And who's that foxy-faced fellow at the door?"

"That's Carvajan, the shopman. He's a knowing lad, who keeps the shop going, for old Gatelier spends more time at the tavern than he does at his business."

Monsieur de Clairefont nodded his head to signify that he knew all he wished to learn, and the well-trained lackey resumed his solemn silence.

After that, Honoré was continually to be seen passing through the Rue du Marché. He invented pretexts for going into the town, walking from Clairefont to La Neuville, where the tradespeople met him meandering along with his stick under his arm, lost in thought. His conduct gave rise to endless gossip. What motive could the the marquis have in walking through these streets paved with stones so rough that they cut the feet, when he had the velvety paths of his park? For whom did he come?

Carvajan knew well for whom it was—Carvajan, who, from an attic window, watched the young man every time he walked through the street. From the very first he had instinctively known that Edile was the attraction, and



a sudden, wild hatred had arisen in his heart. He had felt that his ambition, which was to succeed his master, and his happiness, which would have been to marry this charming girl, were being threatened at the same time; and that his plans, which he had so carefully elaborated for the whole ten years he had been with old Gatelier, were being compromised merely through the caprice of an aristocrat.

He would turn pale with rage when he heard the firm sharp step of the marquis on the pavement, during the hours when everyone else was shut up at home overcome by heat. He pondered all sorts of terrible schemes of vengeance, and as he leaned out of his garret with his eyes fixed on his enemy, he thought of how providentially a piece of stone falling from the high gable of the old house could put an end to the adventure, and unconsciously he dug his fingers into the crevices of the wall. One day a fragment of mortar falling on the shoulder of the marquis made him look up, and in the shadow of the window he distinguished a face with two gleaming, tiger-like eyes. Honoré realized the danger, and afterwards took care to walk on the other side of the way—he had recognized the man who had taken up the position of an enemy the first day he had seen him.

The marquis made inquiries and found that Gatelier's clerk was the son of a Spanish non-commissioned officer named Juan Carvajal, who had come to France in the train of King Joseph in 1813. He had settled in La Neuville and had gained a scanty living by writing letters, etc., for the peasants. Carvajal Juan being contracted into Carvajan by colloquial pronunciation, this altered form of the name became the one that was always used.

But if the cornhandler's clerk had inherited a French name from his father, it was not so with his character or temperament. Intelligent and fairly well-educated, owing to his origin, he had a most passionate and vindictive nature. He was a man patiently to wait his time to strike an enemy, but, when the moment came, to slaughter without mercy.

He had entered Gatelier's service when he was sixteen, and had soon discovered the power that a dealer in grain can obtain over the rustic population. He was too ambitious to limit his ideas to the making of a fortune, and he dreamed of attaining an important position in the province. He carefully watched the social changes which were taking place in France, and, foreseeing the predominance of the wealthy middle-class, he determined to be a rich



*bourgeois* and to have the whole *arrondissement* under his control. Thus the Marquis Honoré had a formidable adversary, though he was quite unconscious of the fact.

The Neuville fair which takes place on St. Firmin's day, fell that year on Sunday, the twenty-fifth of September. This fair answers the double purpose of giving the little town an opportunity of enjoying itself and also of treating about business affairs; for the large land-owners and farmers of the district come in throngs to the four days' fair, where large sales of horses, cattle and cereals take place. Old Gatelier had always made his provision for the winter at this fair. It was then that he met the farmers and struck his bargains seated at a table at the Café du Commerce with the aid of numerous nips of spirit. Not for an hour during the whole three days was the cornchandler sober, and, strange to say, the more tipsy he was, the harder were the bargains he drove. As his mouth opened, his purse closed. On the third day the good man was always as round as a barrel, all his purchases were completed, and he was carried to his own home, there to sleep himself sober.

While their elders settled their business, the younger people gave themselves up to pleasure, and the public ball, then held in a tent erected before the mayoralty, was always crowded. All the middle-class population of La Neuville went to it, and the high families in the neighborhood put in an appearance from a feeling of friendly condescension to their farmers, whose wives and daughters looked forward to this fete from the beginning of the year. It was customary for the gentry to dance at least one dance, and Carvaján thought with hatred that the young marquis would be able to ask Edile to be his partner and then talk to her, while he would be powerless.

To his great surprise, Honoré did not appear at the ball the first day of the fete. He showed himself in the market-place, chatted with the farmers, paid attention to their daughters, spent money at all the stalls, distributed his purchases amongst the children who flocked round him, found a pleasant word and smile for all, and then withdrew, saying he had a violent headache, while Edile laughed, danced, and amused herself, affecting such utter indifference, that Jean, freed from his apprehensions, relaxed his watchfulness. He even began to think that the marquis' caprice was but a passing one, and that some other fantasy had already put it out of his head; and laughing at his own fears of compromised future and lost



happiness, he displayed an unusual flow of spirits.

On the Sunday, he competed in the games of skill prepared for the young men, with the passionate earnestness which was natural to him, and gained several prizes. The marquis had not been seen, and it was said that he was ill, so for a few hours Carvaján was completely happy. His heart expanded, his nerves were strung to the pitch of enjoyment, and he led the dance with indefatigable zeal. At midnight, just as the ball was at its height, he looked for Edile to ask her to be his partner. He could not find her. He asked all Gatelier's friends after her, but no one had seen her. Carvaján's limbs trembled, a mist floated before his eyes, and he was choked by a terrible palpitation of the heart. He had a presentiment that he had been tricked, and that the marquis' absence was but a blind. First he hastened to the *Café du Commerce*, where he found his master incapable of putting two ideas together, or of walking a yard, and then he ran to the *Rue du Marché*, hoping that Edile, feeling tired, had gone home, but before he reached the house he saw that it was all dark, and that there was no light in the young girl's room. He went in, hastened up the stairs, which echoed mournfully beneath his feet, and knocked at the door. There was no answer. He stood dazed, listening to the dull, quick beating of his heart; then, overwhelmed by the sense of his helplessness, he sat on the stairs and wept for rage as much as for grief.

He remained there a long while, pondering terrible schemes of vengeance, while the noise of the fete and the music of the orchestra sounded in his ears, deadened by the distance. Then one idea gleamed bright in his anger-clouded brain. Perhaps Edile was at *Clairefont*, perhaps there was yet time to tear her from the marquis. He rushed downstairs, and then along the rugged road of the plateau. He did not take more than a quarter of an hour to climb the steep hill, and he tore like a madman to the park-gate, which he found open. A carriage and two vigorous post-horses stood before the *chateau*; he heard the door close with a bang which seemed to shake his very heart, and just as the coachman was about to start, he ran forward. In the darkness of the carriage he could confusedly see the forms of a man and woman, and with a moan he seized the handle of the door, and opened it, crying:

"Edile!"

He was answered by a stifled exclamation, while at the same moment a muscular hand seized the collar of his



coat and threw him back, and an imperious voice said :

“Drive on !”

Carvajan saw that nearly every chance was gone, and that it needed but a turn of the wheels to place between him and the woman he loved an abyss impossible ever to bridge over. Making a last attempt, he sprang to the horses' heads, shouting :

“Edile, get out ! There is yet time ! You sha'n't go !”

The horses were impatiently champing their bits. The same imperious voice, now slightly shaking with anger, spoke again :

“Let us have an end of this ! If he does not go away cut him across the face with your whip.”

The coachman raised his arm, there was a swishing sound, and Carvajan, with bleeding cheek, and chest bruised by the carriage-pole, fell to the ground.

When he regained consciousness, the court-yard was dark and silent, and in the distance on the Paris high road, looking like two stars, shone the lanterns of the carriage which was bearing away Edile and her seducer. Carvajan rose to his feet, and with dry eyes and aching heart walked back to the Rue du Marché, where old Gatelier had just been put to bed. He went to his master, tried to arouse him, shouted in his ear that his daughter had eloped with Monsieur de Cliarefont.

“Carried off, do you hear ?” he yelled, tugging at the arm of the old drunkard. “Carried off by that scoundrel—”

“Ah, ah—carried off,” hiccoughed Gatelier, in whose brain there still lingered some dim notions of commercial enterprise. “Carried off, but you know, Carvajan, the carriage must be paid by the buyer.”

The clerk let go of the wretched man, who dropped into a heavy sleep again, and going up to his attic, Carvajan threw himself on the bed, with shame and anger.

However, Edile's flight, which seemed destined to upset all Carvajan's plans, resulted most happily for him ; for he was one of those privileged beings for whom everything turns out for the best, even misfortune. Gatelier, forsaken by his daughter, could find no other remedy for his grief but an increase of drunkenness. He lived at the Café du Commerce, and from morn to night he was to be seen there, his eyes glaring, his speech thick, while the table which was reserved for him became covered with his empty glasses. Completely besotted, he no longer paid any attention to his business, never mentioned his daughter's name, left his house entirely to Carvajan, and in three



years his shop acquired an importance it had never had when Gatelier settled his bargains between his drinks.

Carvajan, cold, methodical, and exact, went all over the district visiting the farmers and advancing money to those who were embarrassed, taking as security the crops as they stood, and thus laying the foundation of an agrarian bank, which in later life was of the utmost importance to him, both from a financial and political point of view.

At the beginning of the fourth year, Gatelier died. His funeral was very largely attended, for all his drinking companions were there. His daughter, who arrived the morning the burial took place, went straight to the Rue du Marché, whence she went to the church with Carvajan, dressed in black, and wearing a thick crape veil, which hid her face completely. After the ceremony, she returned to the Rue du Marché, and left La Neuville again that evening, after remaining shut up with Carvajan the whole day.

The following morning the house painter was summoned and told to erase the old inscription from the door and to put the name of Carvajan in the place of Gatelier; and thus La Neuville learned that the clerk had become the head, and had succeeded to his master's business. But what contract had been approved by Edile, or what agreement had been arranged between her and the man who had so dearly loved her, no one ever knew. She never returned to La Neuville, and there was a vague report that she was living in Paris, while some of the townspeople who set up for being well-informed about what was passing in the capital, said that the marquis had soon tired of the pretty villager and had left her, after handsomely setting her up in a large underclothing shop. Edile had in fact married a bureaucrat with whom she lived very happily, and that was the commonplace conclusion of her love-tale. For some time Carvajan went about looking pale and sad, but no one dared to question him, although the curiosity was general; for this thin, angular little man had a way of staring at the importunate, which put an end to any familiarity.

From this time Carvajan lived but for his hatred and ambition, and he was not distracted from one by the other, for both had the same object in view, and the progress that was made by the one was also made by the other. His ambition was to overthrow and take the place of the Marquis de Clairefont, who occupied the highest position and possessed the largest fortune in the province, and his hatred would be amply satisfied when this two-



fold result was obtained. A man who ardently and persistently pursues one aim in life is invincible, and Carvajan, who was endowed with an imperious will and inexhaustible patience, was determined to subordinate every act to the slow, sure preparation of his vengeance.

He knew that the result he was aiming at he would perhaps have to wait years to attain, but he was impassively prepared to go on working at his subterranean mine, until the day when a last blow would bring about the final downfall. The absence of the marquis had in no wise lessened the violence of his feelings, for he had but to look up to remember. There on the hill was the white wall of Clairefont, and there was the spot where he had arrived after a breathless course to rescue Edile on the night of the fair. That he, Carvajan, should have been so completely duped by that lad of a marquis! Although it was ten years ago he turned pale with anger and humiliation at the thought.

From a distance he watched Honoré's life, and noted with joy that the aristocrat's fortune was diminishing as his own augmented. Monsieur de Clairefont, soon tired of his frivolous existence, had returned to his scientific amusements and had started various industrial enterprises, not one of which succeeded. His mind was more quick than well-balanced, more impetuous than practical; he would take up an idea, follow it for a time, and think of nothing else; then, after a great waste of time and money, abandon it for another. Carvajan, who received exact information about all these costly experiments, laughed:

"You will see that there will be no need for me to interfere; he will ruin himself."

One day some news which thrilled Carvajan with sombre joy was spread through the town. The marquis had returned to his estate. A carriage bearing a coat-of-arms had been seen waiting at the railway station, and a gentleman had come by the train, a dim shadow of the brilliant *seigneur* who had turned all the feminine heads in La Neuville in bygone times. Carvajan, wishing to ascertain for himself the presence of his enemy, climbed the hillside and from the road saw the chateau windows thrown wide open. For a long time he stayed at the edge of the terrace, plunged in gloomy meditation, and when evening was drawing on he saw Honoré walking slowly amidst the flower-beds. Carvajan hardly knew him, so altered was he. The figure which used to be so lithe and slender had broadened, the handsome charming features were not so clearly cut, the hair was very thin.



He was still a fine, noble looking gentleman, but he was no longer the good-looking youth with the womanish graces which had made him so fascinating. Carvajan watched him with his piercing eyes, and when he had seen him disappear round a bend in the path:

"So you are imprudent enough to return within my reach," he said, stretching out a menacing hand in the marquis' direction. "Very well, we shall see which will win." And slowly he returned to the dark and gloomy little house where he fostered his hatred in solitude.

Honoré was fated to astonish the inhabitants of La Neuville. As before he had led a mad, noisy existence, so he now lived a retired and industrious one. He was assiduous in his endeavors to improve his lands and make the most of his woods. He seemed to have peculiar ideas about everything, for he turned most of the spare ground about the chateau into meadows and erected a model dairy, while in the midst of the Clairefont woods he set up a steam-saw and began to effect some important clearings. He was constantly to be seen inspecting his works, and he never seemed so happy as when in the midst of his workmen. He applied all sorts of improvements of his own invention to the processes of felling the trees, and was always ready to put his hand to the work when the apparatus did not act. The rest of his time he passed in a turret-room filled with physical and chemical apparatus, and where he had had a furnace constructed for his chemical experiments; and he lived there in the glow of light which fell through the colored panes of the large old windows like some Doctor Faust. A servant had one day burnt his hands terribly with a phial of acid, and since then the marquis had given the task of tidying the laboratory entirely to a confidential valet who had accompanied him everywhere and was devoted to him. This gave rise to extraordinary tales about this room which was now surrounded with mystery. It was said that the marquis forbade anyone to enter it because he was making experiments in magic, and when sometimes in the evening the windows of the turret were illuminated with a fantastic glow, the passers-by watched with terror the gleams which shot out amidst the darkness in the distance.

He had no doubt discovered a secret way of manuring his fields and fertilizing his meadows, for since he had interested himself in agriculture his harvests were immense.

"Our master certainly gets fine wheat and plenty of hay," said his farmers enviously. "We don't know what manures he uses, but they cost a great deal and perhaps



they're not right for men to use."

Carvajan, who did not believe in witchcraft, saw at once how he could turn the marquis' new line of conduct to his own advantage. In the visits he was constantly paying all over the *arrondissement*, he said to the farmers:

"Well, my good friends, you have an unexpected rival. Monsieur Honoré is growing crops and sending his milk to market. He has the means of working on a large scale, and you must expect a fall in prices, for of course he doesn't want the money and he will undersell you."

In this way he indirectly excited discontent. He had already found an ally in Tondeur, the wood-merchant, who could not watch in silence Monsieur de Clairefont cutting down his own oaks and sending them direct to the great ship-building yards, while what made him most wrathful of all was the steam-saw that the marquis used. On that point he could never say enough.

"What!" he would explain to his boon companions at the inn. "Here are we poor wretches with only our arms to get us a living, and here's this man, with all his money, lessening our chances of employment by using machines which go by themselves. A wood-cutter can get only two francs a day for his work now instead of three, and, by Jove, I can find as many men as I want only too ready to work for that. There are more workmen now than there is work for them to do."

As a matter of fact, the steam-engine and the saws of Honoré's invention not only brought in no money but cost a great deal. But by lowering the rate of wages the timber-merchant attained the double end of doing the marquis considerable moral harm and of making a good deal of money.

Yet, in spite of all that Carvajan and his clique could say, the popularity of the chateau was still great, and the work of destruction was not to be finished in a day.

In 1847, Monsieur de Clairefont, having stood as a candidate at the elections for the General Council with the support of the Royalist committees, had won by a large majority, utterly defeating Zéphyre Dumontier, the wealthy miller of the valley, who represented the Republican party. The electoral campaign had been a hardly-fought one, and Carvajan had shown himself so strongly in favor of Honoré's opponent that the miller's daughter was struck by his behavior and thought that what the cornchandler was doing from hatred he was doing from love. Carvajan was too practical not to profit by the advantages he possessed in the damsel's imagination, and



six months later he married her with a dowry of a hundred thousand francs.

The following year the marquis married also, marrying for love instead of for money as his father had done. His bride was the younger daughter of the Baron de Saint Maurice, whose estates were near those of Monsieur de Clairefont, and who was an old man of great pride and little fortune, possessed with a great sense of his own high rank and important position, which aristocratic ideas he had transmitted to his elder daughter, Mademoiselle Isabelle. The new marchioness, who was a simple, sweet tempered woman, bore her husband two children, Robert and Antoinette, and was during her too brief lifetime the angel of the household. When at thirty-five years of age she died, she took with her all the wisdom of the house and left Honoré an easy prey to his inventive mania, which had become more costly as he grew older.

Robert was thirteen and Antoinette ten when they lost their mother, and to take her place they had only a father absorbed in schemes of a scientific Utopia, and an old maiden aunt, whom celibacy had made decidedly masculine, and who was fifty years behind current ideas.

Mademoiselle Isabelle had deserted the little Chateau de Saint-Maurice to take up her abode at Clairefont, and while her brother-in-law passed his life in making discoveries which were admirable in theory but ruinous in practice, she taught her young niece to ride, shot in the park with her nephew, and astonished everyone by her decided tone, her strange theories and her outspokenness, though at heart she was the most moral woman that ever lived, and so ugly into the bargain that no one could ever have conceived the shadow of an improper thought about her. She was ignorant to the point of saying that Henri IV. was the son of Henri III., and had a brusque sensitiveness which was almost an inclination to grumble. She had nearly a beard, and if anyone had so far forgotten himself as to call her madam instead of mademoiselle she would have been capable of boxing his ears. Never had so many barbarisms fallen from one mouth before. An expression of hers was:

“My nephew rides like a bucentaur.”

The marquis had tried to tell her of the education of Achilles and the lessons of the centaur Chiron and to make her see the difference between a man-horse and the barge of the doge of Venice, but she had answered readily:

“My dear, leave me alone with your ‘correctments.’ Everyone speaks in his own way, and I am not sure



yours is the right one. The chief thing is for people to know what I mean, and until now your son and daughter have understood what I wished to say. Our forefathers didn't know as much as you do, and things couldn't have gone better than in their time, whereas nowadays everything is in a regular 'cacophony.'"

His Aunt Isabelle had exercised a most harmful influence over Robert's character. From his childhood she had petted the young count with a rough affection, and had led him to think that the world had been created for the special pleasure and use of the Clairefontes and Saint Maurices, and that other beings who happened to be on it were merely the servants of these two noble families.

Robert, who was a handsome, good-natured, ruddy-complexioned boy, gifted with an extraordinarily idle mind and a prodigiously active body, did credit to his Aunt Isabelle's system of education and showed himself the most ardent sportsman, the deepest drinker and the boldest lover in the department. There was something of the masculine and brutal grandeur of the feudal lords about him, and when her brother-in-law bewailed his son's idle and turbulent ways, old Mademoiselle de Saint Maurice would say:

"Yes, you are quite amazed at him, no doubt. You are a Clairefont of to-day, he is a Clairefont of the past."

As for Antoinette, she had developed into a charming, simple, modern young lady, in spite of her aunt's tumultuous teaching. She was not at all like a marchioness in her manners, which were as sweet and gentle as her brother's were noisy, and by varied reading she had managed to learn a great deal without neglecting the physical exercises of which old Mademoiselle Isabelle was such an ardent upholder. She was tall and exquisitely proportioned; her eyes were dark, shining and full of expression, her face was oval and fresh-complexioned, and when her curved lips were parted, two rows of even white teeth could be seen, while, notwithstanding her height, she had tiny hands and feet. There was an air of good-nature about her; one felt that she was healthy in mind and body—indeed she was suggestive of a ripe peach, delightful alike to eye and taste.

She adored her father, whom she spoiled like a child. The only one in the house who paid any attention to his scientific theories, she tried hard to understand them, and, when she did not succeed, confidently admired them all the same. She drew clear copies of his plans and filled them in with water-colors, to Monsieur de Clairefont's in-



tense delight; and the touching admiration he read in his daughter's eyes was the sweetest triumph the marquis could have had. It was, besides, his only one, for never had so unlucky an inventor existed. Not once had Monsieur de Clairefont—whose fertile brain was constantly filled with fresh ideas—obtained a result of any practical use. He devoted himself to trying to find some bold and profitable improvement in agricultural matters; bold his inventions certainly were—some people indeed called them mad—but profitable they were not, except as far as the men who sold the apparatus, the chemical products and the other costly things needed to carry out his ideas, were concerned.

Aunt Isabelle expressed her opinion on her brother-in-law's reasoning monomania with perfect frankness.

"You've got a tile loose," she told him. "You're not mad enough to be shut up in a lunatic asylum, and you've not got enough sense to be left free. You'll squander all your money on your 'machinations,' and when it's all gone, neither you nor I will know where to get any more from. In olden times a good *lettre de cachet* would have calmed you down, but now one can get nothing of the sort, and in the meantime you're throwing everything away."

The marquis laughed at these scoldings, which were uttered by the old virago almost at the top of her voice.

"One of these days, sister, I shall find what I am seeking, and you will be astounded by seeing me make a fortune which will be envied by our largest merchants, for with one stroke I shall gain riches and renown."

"And then people will say: 'Clairefont, dealer in this, or manufacturer of that.' A fine renown indeed! When you married my sister, you still had eighty thousand francs a year. It was a good income, and you should have kept within it and have laid something by to give your children. But you prefer to lavish it on science, and allow yourself to be taken in by swindlers who charge you a tremendous price for little odds and ends not worth twopence, and never think of the future. But you have enemies, and you know the proverb—'You shouldn't count without your hoist.'"

"Without your host, my dear sister," corrected Honoré, gently, and with a shake of his head, which was already white, he went up to his turret again.

In spite of the anxiety that the daily diminution in the marquis' financial resources caused his family, the occupants of Clairefont were happy, and this was not the case in Carvajan's house, notwithstanding the notorious



increase of influence and wealth he had gained.

For the last ten years the little house in the Rue du Marché had remained just the same as when it was occupied by old Gatelier, except that now it was Carvajan and his family who lived their hardworking lives there instead of the tipsy old cornchandler. The illusions of Monsieur Dumontier's daughter had been speedily dissipated, and she had shed many bitter tears since she had discovered that her husband had only married her for her money. Her child was the only bright spot in her life. Little Pascal was her all—her present and her future; his smile made her forget her sorrows, and she cheerfully acquiesced in Carvajan's rigid economy, thinking that one day her son would be the richer for it.

Pascal grew up in the low, narrow, dark old house in fear and trembling of his father—that terrible man with the bronzed skin, sharp nose and eyes as round, shining and as yellow as golden *louis*. But behind this threatening countenance was his mother's pale, sad face—the mother whose gentle look seemed to reach his heart, and whose tender words opened and instructed his mind. They lived, she and he, in a room wainscoted with dark wood, and with one window still filled with the old greenish panes, on the sill of which stood a large box full of growing pinks, and wallflowers. Pascal used to take his playthings by this window, and thus his mother could feast her eyes on her child and her flowers at the same time.

Carvajan was only seen at meal times. When he was not hastening along the roads, he shut himself up in his office, which was on the ground floor, and whither the farmers in need of a loan brought, clinging to their heavy boots, specimens of the soil of all the hamlets in the district. The heavy knocker, lifted by impatient hands, would echo dully through the hall, and then on the stones came the drawling step of the servant going to open the door. Sometimes the sound of a violent discussion, promptly stopped by Carvajan's sharp, incisive tones, reached the first story; the doors would be slammed, and Pascal would put his head out of the window between the flower-stalks and see the visitor walking down the Rue du Marché, with his head bent and his shoulders bowed as if weighed down by some heavy burden. Sometimes when he reached the corner of the marketplace the man turned round, displaying an angry face and threatening fist, and once a peasant had stood before the house and cried:



"You have my cows, you have my land. Do you want my skin as well, you scoundrel of a usurer?"

The child was only seven years old when this incident occurred, and he pondered over it a long while, feeling that it was an insult that had been addressed to his father, but failing to understand its signification. The word impressed itself upon his memory, and he tried to discover its sense and weight. In his imagination he formed a terrible image of a usurer, in the form of one of those dark, ferocious giants of the fairy tales, who are the terror of the innocent and the weak. He dreamt of this creation at night, seeing the horrible monster with his father's face, until at last he could contain himself no longer, and, after a great deal of hesitation, ventured to ask his mother,

"What is a usurer?"

The poor woman turned pale beneath her child's limpid gaze. For a moment she was a silent, then she said:

"Why do you ask?"

Pascal told her of the scene he had witnessed, and, after a moment's thought, Madame Carvajan said:

"Never repeat that word, my darling. Those who are unhappy are very often unjust. That man was very likely going away from here without having obtained what he wanted, and he blamed your father for his disappointment. But you may be sure that even if Carvajan is sometimes a little hard in business matters, he is scrupulously honest. He is your father, and you ought to love and respect him."

But as she spoke there was a slight quiver in her voice, and her eyes filled with tears. Pascal never forgot this scene, and later on he understood its painful meaning.

Of the merciless warfare that his father had commenced against the Marquis de Clairefont, Pascal was totally ignorant during his youth, for Carvajan knew how to keep his secrets, and he had never confided his hopes of vengeance to anyone.

Pascal was first sent to the college at Evreux to commence his studies; then, as Carvajan's wealth continued to increase, a provincial course of instruction seemed insufficient for his son, so his heir presumptive was sent to Paris, where he stayed until he was twenty.

He passed all his examinations, entered as a law student, and returned to La Neuville with a licentiate's degree. He was a man by then, and his mind knew how to appreciate what his eyes beheld. He found no change in the house in the Rue du Marché; it was still dark and low, and there were the same trampings of muddy boots,



the same muttered discussions. Everything had grown older; the lender and the borrowers had aged, but the traffic in money went on exactly as it had done in the past. The faces still puckered with rage, the lips still parted to utter a word which was left unspoken now (for Carvajan was a man who had to be conciliated), and this word was the word of the past, the word which would be applied to him all his life—usurer.

Carvajan had not altered his style of living, and he kept but a general servant who worked like a horse. Madame Carvajan still shut herself up in her room as she had done before Pascal went away, and the only change that could be seen in her was that her hair had turned gray. It was a moment of intense joy for her when she again pressed her son in her arms, but her joy was of short duration, for it was evident that Pascal and his father could not agree; and for anyone who knew Carvajan the situation portended furious storms.

At the end of the twenty-four hours he had allowed for maternal effusiveness, the head of the family summoned his son to the office on the ground-floor, where Pascal found him quietly pacing up and down.

"My boy," said his father, stopping abruptly in his promenade, "you are back again in my house, and I am pleased to see you here. You have passed your examinations well and everything leads me to believe that you are no fool. I have been thinking that, of course, you intend to seek employment. You are a barrister by profession, and we have a court here where those who plead are fools, so you would have no trouble in showing your superiority. I am in a position to help you to acquire a good practice; are you disposed to follow this path?" And as the young man bowed his head without speaking—

"Yes? Then you must enter your name at the bar of La Neuville; to begin, look over these for me."

So saying, he took a pile of papers from his desk and placed them in his son's arms. Then giving him a friendly tap on the shoulder, he said:

"You can be of great use to me if you choose, and in return I'll put you in the way of making money."

Pascal shut himself up alone all day and went through the papers, which soon opened his eyes. What his father vaguely called "things" was the art of exploiting one's fellow-creature with astounding skill and dexterity. It was all barely within the limits of the Code, and in shady cases there were middle-men who took the responsibility and left Carvajan the profits. In not one transaction was



the banker's name to be found. He had merely bought up the bills, and all the tricks of the system of names that go for nothing passed before Pascal's astonished eyes. In that one day he formed an opinion of his father which nothing could ever eradicate, and with his head bowed over the mass of legal quibbling which had just served as such a painful revelation of the truth, he remained lost in thought. All the suddenly recalled past returned to his mind. He remembered the unfortunate wretches who used to go out of the little house looking like shorn sheep. Again he heard the discussions which teemed with violent words, again he saw the convulsed faces, the clenched fists shaken against his father's roof, again the abominable word rang in his ear—usurer! Could he, indeed, be the son of such a man, he whose heart glowed with generous sentiments, he who loved the good, the true and the beautiful? And was he going to become his accomplice? Was he to shield him publicly with his power, defend him with his words and lend the aid of his knowledge to the mean and pitiful work of despoiling the weak? No! Never!

Night was falling over La Neuville, and the deserted streets were silent. The sky was crimson with the last rays of the sun, which had almost sunk below the horizon. There came the faint, melancholy sound of a church bell ringing in the distance, and to the young man it seemed to be tolling the knell of his innocence. He told himself that all was over for him in this life, that he would never know another moment's happiness, and he wept bitterly.

He trembled at the thought of meeting his father, but it had to be done, for he found himself driven into a situation from which there was no escape by his integrity. He went downstairs to the dining-room, where he found his parents already seated at the table, on which the soup was steaming. His mother was struck by his dejected air, and glanced at him anxiously. Cavajan rubbed his hands together, and said with a laugh:

"Here's a fellow who looks as though he has been working hard! Very good, but now let's have dinner."

The meal was passed in silence. Pascal ate, absorbed in the preparation of defensive arguments. Madame Carvajan sadly bowed her head with the presentiment of a storm, and Carvajan greedily devoured his food. Dinner over, he said to his wife:

"My dear, you can go up to your room. Pascal and I have to talk."

He took the young man into his office, seated himself,



and, with a piercing look, said in his hard voice:

"Well."

No preamble, no leading up, no hesitation; he went straight to the point at once. And there must be no evasion in the answer to this terrible, threatening "Well?" Pascal called up his courage, steadied his trembling limbs, and opening his parched lips, said in a strange voice:

"Well, father, to tell you the truth, I think these matters deplorable. I have studied them thoroughly, and your reputation can but suffer if you follow them up as far as the law permits. If I might offer you advice, it would be to come to an arrangement to avoid publicity."

Carvaján did not reply at once. His face hardened, he gave vent to an ironic whistle; then, slowly rising:

"But I have advanced money, my boy, and I must be repaid. I am not afraid of the light being thrown on my actions. I simply find myself compelled to sell up the debtors who do not pay me what they owe. These brutes of peasants have a mania for borrowing more than they can pay back. Those who have no land give me their crops as security—the agrarian credit, you know—and without me they wouldn't be able to pay their landlords. Do you think I am going to make them a present of my money? After all, *sacrebleu*, I am not a philanthropist, but a man of business, and at the expiration of the time I must have either the money or the security. But you are letting me talk on, with your airs of innocence, as if you did not understand the question just as well as I do! Don't you see you mustn't judge things from a theoretical point of view, or with the ideas you had at college? You must be practical. Would you like me to tell you the whole truth about the matter? Well, then, these rogues that you are pitying so much, get the better of me, and these bargains, which seem so terrible to you, I simply lose over!"

He uttered these words with so admirably simulated an accent of conviction that his son could not find a word to answer. People got the better of him! He, Carvaján, was the victim, and his debtors plundered him!

The banker took a few strides, then placing himself opposite his son and looking him straight in the face:

"But there is only one thing we need concern ourselves about. Will you take charge of my affairs?"

For one second Pascal hesitated. Then the blood mounted to his face and he answered shortly:

"No."

"Ah, ah," said Carvaján, "you don't mince your words. But do you think I'm going to have you doing nothing?"



"I will find something to do, father, never fear. And I implore you not to try to force me."

"Have I shown any intention of doing so?" said Carvajan roughly. "I should have been pleased to make you a partner in my transactions and to have let you profit by my experience, but you scorn my help and pretend that your own strength is sufficient for you. It is possible that I have produced an eagle, but until I receive proof to the contrary, I shall think you a gander. Good-bye, my lad. You are setting up for a man with principles. We shall see how much that will benefit you in life."

He opened the door, signed to his son to go out, and without adding another word closed the door behind him. When he was alone he paced the room for some time in silence, his face distorted with anger. At last he stopped, and bringing his hand violently down upon his desk:

"How dared he set up his opinion against mine!" he exclaimed. "A boy of twenty to criticize his father's doings! Oh well, I have left him free to do as he likes, *sacrebleu!* It's the first time I have tolerated any resistance, and, upon my word, I think he had the best of it."

He shook his head, remained for a moment lost in thought, then added, with a slight smile:

"He knows what he wants. He's a Carvajan."

Yes, Pascal was a Carvajan, but a Carvajan with all the energetic determination, all the passionate ardor of his race based upon a foundation of scrupulous integrity. He kept his word and entered his name at the Court of La Neuville, but he had hardly practiced there a year before his reputation was such that he was sent to the Court of Rouen to oppose the shrewd old Normandy lawyers there. He spoke with extraordinary clearness and elegance of diction, and, warming with his subject, he often reached the height of true eloquence. The astonished magistrates listened without feeling bored or wanting to doze, and his cases gained by the attention he managed to secure.

The unexpected glory which Pascal reflected on him produced a double result upon old Carvajan—it at once flattered and enraged him. He knew the young man would rapidly acquire considerable influence, and he also knew he was slipping from his power. If Pascal's abilities had only attained mediocrity he would not have cared; he would simply have kept him at home with contemptuous indifference and given him his board and lodging. But when Pascal showed himself possessed of talents so superior, was it not exasperating to be unable to use him?



What an instrument of strength he would have been in the hands of a clever man, and how quickly that man could have made himself master of the *arrondissement*! The only thing Carvajan was wanting in was the gift of speech. He had ideas, but he could not express them. But in addition to all the favors she already bestowed upon him, Fate had given him a son capable of being his mouthpiece, and now this mouthpiece was unruly and would not repeat the arguments whispered to him.

There was no longer any question of committing affairs of a shady character to Pascal's care, for Carvajan's ambition kept pace in its growth with that of the barrister's repute. No, what he wanted now was to oppose the marquis on political ground, to turn public opinion in his own favor and so assure his election.

But how could he gain the ascendant over his son? He had never shown him any affection; he had let him grow up without seeking to win his heart, and now it was too late to try. There was, however, one last resource for him, there was still one sure and powerful lever left for him to use—Pascal's affection for his mother.

For some years the poor woman had suffered from very delicate health, and daily she had grown weaker without uttering a complaint. Her son's return had been a great joy to her. His presence seemed to brighten and light up the old house. Carvajan himself seemed less morose and better tempered; he stayed in the dining-room of an evening after dinner talking with cynical *verve* and evidently laying himself out to please. He was becoming quite sociable, and the mother and son, while they rejoiced at the change, could not help wondering what designs this amiability served to hide.

One morning Carvajan went into his wife's room as soon as it was light, inquired after her health, gave her a playful tap on the cheek and, seating himself, said:

"Will you have a little talk, my dear? I want your help in a very delicate negotiation. If you do what I am going to ask you, I shall be infinitely obliged to you, and it lies within your power if only you will do it."

"Whom does it concern?" asked the mother, turning pale and a pang shooting through her heart.

"Your son."

"What has happened to him?"

"Nothing, nothing; don't be alarmed. It is not a question of the present but the future, about which I am occupying myself in his interests. He is a clever fellow and it is to your credit that you are his mother. Nothing



is too high for him to aim at, but one must look a long way ahead to succeed, and that is what has brought me here. You and he are always talking together, and you ought to give him good sound advice instead of chatting about trifles. There is a high position to be gained in the country for the man who knows how to turn all these new ideas to his advantage. The Republicans are coming daily to the fore and theirs is the side to be on. Talk to Pascal on this subject and tell me what are his opinions. Do your best with him; if you succeed you sha'n't regret it, I promise you."

For a few days he carefully studied the countenances of both mother and son, and watched their every movement in the endeavor to obtain some intelligence, but he discovered nothing. At the end of a week, during which, accustomed to wait and to dissimulate as he was, he was consumed with impatience, he determined to make some inquiries. The answer he received was not at all what he had hoped. Pascal had no political ambition, and the idea of plunging himself into the turmoil of public life was most distasteful to him.

Carvajan listened to what his wife was telling him, a prey to a violent rage which took his very breath away. He felt as if his head had suddenly become hard as stone and was compressing his brain within it, and his thoughts rushed through his mind with dazzling rapidity. For a moment he stood mechanically watching his trembling hands, then with an exclamation he burst forth.

"Do you think you're going to make game of me any longer?" he cried. "You and your son will obey me or you'll leave this house. I am the only master here; no one has ever resisted me yet, and does this young scamp think he is going to set up his will against mine? I'll teach him his place! I'll cut off the comb of your young cock, and then we'll see if he'll crow so high! Do you hear, Madame Carvajan? It'll be the worse for him. I'll turn him out of the house, and the whole town shall know of his behavior to me."

For a long time he went on talking in this strain, finding a vent for his anger in his violent words. He thoroughly terrified his unfortunate wife, who, seized with fever, was compelled to take to her bed. The following day her condition had become highly critical, and by the end of the week she was at the last extremity.

Her son never left her room, tending her with loving care and listening in horror to her delirious wanderings in which she repeated all Carvajan's threats. One even-



ing she regained her reason, and lying an icy hand on Pascal's forehead, she whispered :

"My darling, we are going to be parted, and it is an inexpressible grief to me—I love you so dearly. We have had sorrow lately, but you must forget all about it. Never do any injury to your fellow-creatures; the greatest happiness there is on earth is that of being good."

Her voice died away and she fell into a death-like swoon, but she recovered and asked for her husband. She talked to him for some time while her son retired out of ear-shot into the window where her favorite flowers still bloomed. Carvajan listened to her in silence with a gloomy expression on his face, but at last she made an imperious gesture to which he answered by an assenting nod of the head. Then the face of the dying woman illumined, and she sank back with a sigh of relief, as if a crushing load had just been removed from her shoulders. Calling Pascal, she said to him :

"Let me see you embrace your father."

The young man, overwhelmed with grief, gladly threw himself into his father's arms, and gave him two warm kisses, which the latter returned with lips which the hardness of his heart made more icy than those of the dying woman. Then Madame Carvajan sent her son out of the room, and was left alone with her lawyer. That evening the end seemed near, and she broke the silence she had kept hitherto, and whispered to Pascal :

"I have left all the law permits me to dispose of to your father. I know you are able to make your own fortune, and it was the only way of assuring your peace. Carvajan is a terrible man—never set up your will against his. The loss of your inheritance will be the price of your liberty—forgive me for depriving you of what ought to have been yours. Lead a good life—always be good."

And it was with these gentle words on her lips that she died. Pascal closed her eyes, and bent down to kiss her.

"Be easy, mother. Your goodness is my inheritance."

And, as if the dead woman had heard this promise as she passed over the threshold of eternity, a smile crept over her pale lips.

The day after the funeral, Jean Carvajan called his son into the office which had been the scene of their first disagreement, and said coldly :

"My son, the misfortune which has just befallen us must of necessity make a great change in our lives. Before I arrive at any decision, I should like to know your plans."

"They are very simple, father. If you have no objec-



tion, I shall leave La Neuville."

"You are free to do so," said Carvajan, while his brow frowned at the memory of his disappointed hopes.

"Very well, then I will go to-morrow."

"My house will be open whenever you want to return."

"Thank you," answered Pascal, and not another word was spoken by either.

The next day, Pascal went away, leaving Carvajan alone in the little house in the Rue du Marché.

### CHAPTER III.

When she left Pascal on the plateau overlooking the valley of La Neuville, Mademoiselle de Clairefont quickened her horse's pace, for she was anxious to place a distance between herself and this man whom at first she had liked, and in whom she had been sorry to discover a Carvajan. She would have dismissed him from her thoughts as from her sight, but, in spite of herself, the face of her chance companion with its broad forehead, its clear eyes and serious mouth haunted her persistently. "He has the face of a true and honest man," she thought, "and yet he is the son of a scoundrel. Though," she went on, making an unwonted concession, "perhaps for all that he is good and honorable." But her mind at once rose in revolt against this inexplicable indulgence, and she added to herself, "But that is not very probable. Like father, like son; and besides he looked quite aghast and confused when he heard who I was, and he couldn't look me in the face. Whence does he come to work us harm?" For to Antoinette, it seemed impossible that a Carvajan could have any other aim in life than doing injury to a Clairefont.

But alas! was there still any injury left to do them? What fresh blow could be dealt to this family that had sunk to a degree of poverty which was almost want? And with a feeling of deep melancholy this girl, who was but twenty-three years old, looked back at the past and noted the steps in the slow but sure ruin of her father.

Again she saw the chateau brilliant, full of life, and luxuriously appointed as it had been when she was quite a child. As she grew older, the style of the house fell off; there were not so many horses in the stables, the servants were fewer, the worn furniture remained instead of new taking its place. Her home in fact became less cosy, less warm, less pretty, and she noticed the change; but, with the easy carelessness of youth, attached no importance to



it until the day when, reason lending its light to her maturer mind, she understood that misery was boldly knocking for admittance at the doors of Clairefont, and that its surest ally was the marquis himself.

After that, nothing could be hidden from her penetrating eyes, and often she found a summons on the hall table which had been placed there that very morning, with its icy lugubrious formula in the crabbed legal handwriting, commanding the "aforesaid Monsieur de Clairefont," to pay such and such a sum, in default of which his goods would be seized and sold. But the debt always was paid. A supreme effort was made, all the purses were turned out, all the drawers rummaged over, and as the last drop is extracted from the empty grape-skins, so were the few remains of former opulence made to furnish the needful supply. But it was pitiful to the last degree.

Their material existence alone was not effected by the continual diminution in the patrimonial fortune. Enough to live on could be procured from what was left of the land. The poultry-yard provided fowls, the kitchen-garden vegetables, and the farm flour, beef and mutton. Fires were kept up with wood from the park, horses were fed with hay from the meadows. But money was always scarce, and Mademoiselle de Clairefont was forced to make her own dresses.

The marquis, who was always absorbed in some abstruse problem, seemed not to notice their straitened circumstances, and, indeed, to tell the truth, he was hardly aware of them; for from the day that Antoinette had first realized the embarrassments in which her father had involved his family, she did everything that was possible to spare the inventor the irksomeness of such a situation. She had formed a blockade of affection around him, and had set her wits to work to keep all the worries for herself. She was like a mother to this old child, and who was always full of the hope of making a discovery which would enable him to return a hundredfold that of which he had deprived his family.

On one point alone had it been impossible to put him off. For two years Antoinette had been engaged to Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil, but time after time she had deferred her marriage. The baron was a good-looking, good-natured young officer, whose father, an eminent judge, had a right to aspire to the highest judicial position. The union between the two families, which had been arranged when the marquis was still in apparent possession of his estate, had seemed on the eve of being



concluded. Mademoiselle de Clairefont had regarded her suitor very favorably, and the baron seemed much attached to his *fiancée*. The family lawyers had held sundry conferences, by which it was shown that the future bridegroom inherited from his mother landed property worth forty thousand francs a year, and his bride three hundred thousand francs, also from her mother, her brother having given up his share to her. Everything was settled and arranged, and the banns were about to be published, when Mademoiselle de Clairefont abruptly altered her mind, and, using the death of a distant relative as a pretext, asked for the ceremony to be put off.

Aunt Isabelle, to whom had been confided the mission of announcing Antoinette's fresh decision to the baron, acquitted herself of her task in her usual rough way, with which, however, was mingled a touch of sympathy.

"My dear boy," she had said to Croix-Mesnil in a consolatory way, "my niece has taken it into her head not to marry you just yet, so you must make up your mind to make the best of it like a brave fellow. After all, what is 'demurred' is not lost."

And as the bridegroom complained with tender insistence of the delay it meant to his happiness:

"Don't blame her!" she exclaimed with an emotion which caused her to utter twice as many barbarisms as usual. "That child is simply perfection! If you only knew—but there, you can't know. But, take my word for it—she's an angel. Yes, an 'immatriculate' angel!"

The baron displayed a proper amount of disappointment, expressed sufficient regret, and asked to be allowed to continue his wooing as in the past, a request which was acceded to. The marquis was really grieved by this semi-rupture, but though he persistently questioned his daughter, he could obtain no explanation from her. She only smiled, and answered with the words:

"I am quite happy with you. I would rather wait a little while."

"But I shall feel easier when I see you married, my dear," said the old man. "Your establishment is a great care to me; what would become of you if I were gone?"

Antoinette and Aunt Isabelle exchanged a meaning glance, and a slight smile stole over the lips of the former. She took the old man's white head between her hands, and gently caressing it:

"Don't worry," she said tenderly, "The marriage will take place one day or other, but don't hurry me."

Then with a sudden change of tone she went on:



"Besides, you know how obstinate I am, since I have a little of the Saint-Maurice blood in my veins, and I'm not to be forced into doing what I don't wish."

"She is hiding something from me," thought the marquis, "that her aunt knows all about. It will all come out one of these days."

If, instead of pursuing the flight of his fancies through the labyrinth of his mind, the inventor had looked after his accounts, he might have connected Mademoiselle de Clairefont's resolution with the payment of a bill for two hundred thousand francs, which had been swallowed up by the Great Marl-Pit, and have understood why his daughter no longer wished to marry. But there were only Aunt Isabelle and Carvajan's bailiff who knew of the generous sacrifice Antoinette had made to prevent part of the estate being sold.

Old Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice, who had peculiar ideas on every subject under the sun, managed to draw a consoling conclusion for her niece from the delay to which Croix-Mesnil had been forced to submit.

"After all, my dear, perhaps you are right not to marry this young dragoon too hastily. He cannot love you as you deserve to be loved; he has been too calm and too proper considering how long he has been kept dancing attendance—he ought to have been 'fanatic,' instead of which you have seen how sweet and sugared he has been—just like a glass of syrup. Upon my word, I don't know what soldiers and lovers are made of nowadays."

The marquis, whose thoughts never dwelt long on the same subject, had resumed the even tenor of his studies, but a suspicion still rested like a thorn in his heart, and every now and then he asked.

"Well, my child, and how about Croix-Mesnil? When are going to marry him?"

"Oh, some time, papa," answered Antoinette.

Every two or three months the baron spent a few days at the chateau, during which he went shooting with Robert and riding with Antoinette, but he always went away again without having obtained a decisive answer. A great deal of gossip was indulged in about him in the neighborhood, and he was sarcastically spoken of as the bridegroom of the Greek Kalends.

"If he does not marry," whispered some, "it is because he can dispense with the ceremony. That sort of thing runs in the family. Everyone knows the way that old aunt used to carry on."

Good heavens! How insulted Mademoiselle de Saint-



Maurice would have been if she had only got wind of these rumors, and how she would have boxed the ears of the calumniators. But the Clairefontes lived a very secluded life, and the slander died a natural death on the threshold of their silent, gloomy chateau.

Carried away by her reminiscences, Antoinette had stopped a long while in front of the white slopes of the Great Marl-Pit. She had forgotten her strange meeting, the flight of time, everything, as she sat motionless, the reins hanging loosely on her horse's neck. At her feet lay the timber-work of the pits, disused and decaying; the sheds stood open and deserted; the trucks rested idly on the rails which led to the fireless lime kilns. All the labor which for some years had been so feverishly pushed on was at an end. The immense works which had been commenced had never been finished, and the heaps of chalky, useless earth which lay about were all there was to represent the fortune of the old house, the young girl's hopes of happiness, and the security of her father's old age. The past, the present and the future had been compromised, and yet how often had Antoinette heard her father exclaim as he pointed to the hill: "There lies the fortune of the family!"

Experiments and tests had been applied, which all exclusively proved that the lime at Clairefont could defy competition, and for several years the sale of it had been considerable. But the marquis had invented apparatus meant to be improvements on the old ones, had tried new methods of calcining, and had frittered away all the profits of the enterprise upon these experiments. There was always the same want of coherency in his ideas. It was the fool of the family, ruining himself in search of something better, when he held prosperity, easy and sure, within his hand. The evil genius of the inventor was always urging him in quest of improvement, and consequently, instead of attaining pure and simple success by following the straight and ordinary road, he labored along steep and winding paths only to be rewarded with defeat and ruin.

Still, in spite of the bitter disenchantment so many successive failures had caused her, a last hope still lingered in Antoinette's breast. She had a superstitious faith in her father, and she thought: "Some day he will make an important discovery. And then the chalky blocks will turn to gold as in a marvellous fairy tale."

The sound of the luncheon-bell ringing in the distance aroused her from her dreams, and, touching her steed with



the whip, she set off at a gallop and soon found herself at the chateau gate. She threw aside her pensive air, and with a smile on her face, crossed the immense court-yard, sprang unaided to the ground, opened a stable door, and unbridling her horse, left it to go into its freshly-littered stall. Then drawing her long skirt over her arm she walked to the dining-room, followed by her dog.

In the immense room, paved with red and white marble, with a ceiling divided into panels on which were painted the family arms, and carved side-boards, on which stood some massive old silver, four persons were seated at a long table, waited on by an old servant.

On Monsieur de Clairefont's left was an empty place—that of the late-comer; on his right sat Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice, upright as a grenadier, with her mottled face, while opposite were seated young Count Robert and a man who was tall, sallow and very bald, with hairless face, and blinking eyes sheltered by gold spectacles.

"Ah, here is my child," said the marquis in a tone of satisfaction. "My dear, I was beginning to feel very uneasy about you. I have had the big bell rung three times to call you; have you been so very far?"

"I have been to La Saucelle, papa," answered Antoinette, kissing him. "The farmer's children are ill, and I wanted to know how they were getting on. Good morning auntie."

"Good morning, freshness. Come over to me—you smell of dew and flowers."

"You ought to say that of yourself, auntie; you are radiant this morning."

"Oh, all right, flatterer," returned Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice. "I am radiant like a sunset."

Antoinette went round the table giving a little affectionate tap on her brother's cheek as she passed, and, holding out her hand to the person beside him who had ceremoniously risen:

"I am very pleased to see you, Monsieur Malézeau," she said. "I must ask you to excuse me—I did not know I was to have the pleasure of finding you here. Are things going on well at the office? And how is Madame Malézeau?"

"All are well, mademoiselle, both family and business, and let me assure you, mademoiselle, all at your service," replied the lawyer, who had an inveterate habit of punctuating his sentences with a "monsieur," "madame," or "mademoiselle," productive of the oddest effect.

"That's all right then," said the young girl, and cheer-



fully seating herself beside her father:

"Don't bring anything back for me, Bernard," she said to the old butler. "I will go on with lunch where it is—I am dying with hunger."

So saying, she began to eat with a pretty animation and a youthful and robust appetite which was delightful to see. Her brother watched her for a moment; then, with an affectation of great solemnity:

"My sister, a word with you," he said. "You tell us that you have just returned from La Saucelle, which is perfectly correct, for I saw you going along the plateau. But you have not told us that you had a companion."

Antoinette turned very red, and looked up quickly.

"Come, Robert, what is the meaning of this jest?" exclaimed Aunt Isabelle. "Do you mean that your sister rides along the roads with people you do not know?"

"Oh, he is telling the truth," broke in Mademoiselle de Clairefont. "I was accompanied this morning for more than half an hour by an utter stranger."

"Some beggar, who followed you to the chateau?"

"No, he was quite the opposite of a beggar."

"You are exciting my curiosity," said the marquis with a smile. "Was he then a millionaire?"

"No, but he has a good chance of being one some day, if I am to believe what I hear."

"Ah, you'll see just now that it was some robber who asked Antoinette for her money or her life."

"You are very near it, auntie. For, although he did not make that demand, he was the son of Monsieur Carvajan."

Her words were followed by a silence. Never, for twenty years, had Carvajan's name been pronounced beneath this roof, except as the forerunner of misfortune.

A gloom crept over the marquis' face, and he bent his head as he said in a low tone:

"I had forgotten that Carvajan had a son."

He glanced anxiously at Robert and Antoinette as if he feared lest the hatred of the father, transmitted as an inheritance to the son, should press as heavily on his children as it had done on himself, and then he asked with uneasiness:

"But under what circumstances did this meeting take place? Did this young man speak to you?"

"Yes, papa, to ask me the way, and very respectfully."

"A good thing for him!" muttered Robert with flashing eyes. "For if he had not—"

"I did not know who he was, and I never thought of



asking. A passer-by had asked me which was his road, and as it happened to be mine I offered to guide him. We both walked in silence, and it was only just as we were parting that he told me his name."

"What is he like?" questioned Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice. "Is he gentlemanly or not? Has he the wolf-like jowl of Monsieur, his father?"

"He has the manners of a well-bred man, and as for his face, it is not at all displeasing. But if you are anxious to hear any details about the heir of the house of Carvajan, no doubt Monsieur Malézeau can give you all the information you would like," added Antoinette.

"I, mademoiselle?" stammered the lawyer, laying his hands on his narrow chest in a gesture of protestation.

"The mayor of La Neuville is, I believe, also one of your clients," put in Monsieur de Clairefont, mischievously.

"Oh, it's quite a different matter, sir," exclaimed Malézeau, whose eyes were twinkling nervously. "With Monsieur Carvajan I have merely business relations, while to you, sir, and to your charming family, sir, I am attached by chains of the most respectful devotion"—

"At any rate, Malézeau, you sometimes dine with the mayor, don't you?" interrupted Robert with a smile.

"Very rarely, sir," answered the lawyer, who seemed to be on thorns. "As rarely as possible. But you know what provincial towns are, sir. Anyone in my position is forced to be polite to many people he does not really esteem, sir, or he would not be able to follow his profession, sir. Times are hard—Monsieur Carvajan, with his bank puts a good deal of business in my way, sir—business which I cannot afford to lose. But I assure you there is no intimacy between him and me—none whatever!"

"Come, don't act the Jesuit, Maleézeau!" cried Aunt Isabelle abruptly and scornfully. "Have we ever reproached you for being friendly with that man? Are we the people to set anyone against him? Have we ever replied to his injuries with anything but scorn?"

"Perhaps, mademoiselle, that was not the best return you could have made," murmured the lawyer, glancing uneasily around him. "A little resistance would have made him reflect, mademoiselle. You have made his task too easy for him. One should never disdain one's enemy."

"Would you have us to do such a wretch as that the honor of bestowing any attention upon him?" returned Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice fiercely. "It needs an utterly absurd *régime* like the one we are now under for such creatures to be of any account. Here's this Carvajan



mayor! In bygone times he wouldn't have been made a rural policeman! And as for his son—"

"Oh, his son, mademoiselle, has not much cause to be fond of him. And he left the country because he did not regard things in the same light as his father—"

"Showed his good taste," put in Robert.

"He has travelled a great deal, sir," went on the lawyer. "He was clever or lucky enough, whichever way you choose to put it, to get into the good graces of a powerful financier, who made him his representative, sir. He was given the arrangement of some very delicate matters in America, sir, which he has brought to a most successful termination. He is said to be gifted with great eloquence, sir. After he left college he learned English and Spanish, and it appears that he has spoken in Australia and Peru, in English and Peruvian law-courts, and met with enormous success. He has seen and learned a great deal, improving himself as he travelled, in spite, sir, of the proverb which says: 'A rolling stone gathers no moss.' In a word, he is quite independent, and in my opinion, sir, he will not stay long at La Neuville, sir, for he will get on no better now with Monsieur Carvajan than he did before."

"Then he will be like everybody else, for this scoundrel of a man will spare no one," said the marquis.

For a moment he paused, then he added sadly:

"It is strange that this Carvajan who has wrung money from high and low alike, should be respected, and that I, who have never done anything but help people, should be held in such low esteem."

"People do not respect Monsieur Carvajan, sir," answered Malézeau, "they fear him, which is a very different thing. He has a hold over everyone, and those who might try to resist him, sir, know that the attempt would cost them dear."

Monsieur Clairefont did not reply. Carvajan's sombre figure leaning against the little door of Gatelier's shop with his eyes full of jealous hatred returned to his memory, and all the disastrous consequences of the antagonism which dated from that day came back to his mind. The disaffection of his household, the constant hostility of the peasants, the ill-will of the authorities, and now everyone avoiding him as if he were a leper. He, the former master of the province, had been made a pariah by this upstart, and the work of revenge, commenced twenty years ago, was now very nearly completed. There remained but the merest vestiges of his fortune and his influence,



and the author of his misfortunes stood triumphant on the ruins of the edifice he had so skilfully undermined, with a cynical sneer on his face. Yes, it did indeed cost those dear who attempted to resist him, as no one knew better than Honoré, and it was with anguish that the old man asked himself of what else his implacable enemy was going to deprive him.

Was he about to attack him through his honor? And yet on that point Honoré believed himself invulnerable. The ruin of his fortune might indeed be hastened by secret manœuvres, but to succeed in casting a slur upon his name seemed to him impossible. Would he not eventually retrieve himself? One single invention, carried to a practical result, was all that was needed, and he had just discovered a furnace which was to effect an enormous saving of fuel in factories and places where large fires were needed. It would bring him in a vast income, gathered from all quarters of the globe, and at last he would reap, after passing all his life in sowing. Those who looked upon him as a monomaniac would be dumb with amazement—his sister-in-law, who did not believe in his inventions, to begin with. And what would become of Carvajan's underhand plans and petty snares? His nets would not be strong enough to hold the prey he longed for. He would be crushed, annihilated, swept aside, and the difference would be seen between the low intriguer with his narrow-minded, commonplace ideas and the scholar with his powerful, fruitful conceptions.

Becoming cheered at the thought of this long-hoped success, the marquis smiled again, his face cleared, he rubbed his hands together gleefully and exclaimed:

"Ah, we shall see, we shall see! Come, my friends, it's not all over with me yet!"

Then perceiving that the others were gazing at him in surprise, he returned to his thoughts, again going over, link by link, the chain of ideas which had led him from a gloomy departure to so victorious a conclusion. This time he saw that he was discounting his success, and that for the time being he had far more cause for fear than hope. He rose, and taking his daughter's arm:

"Let us take our coffee outside," he said.

And they all went down the flight of steps and seated themselves beneath a leafy arbor by the stone balustrade of the terrace.

Old Bernard, brought a tray with cups of old Saxe china and a chased silver coffee-pot bearing the arms of France. Antoinette slowly rose and commenced to busy



herself with the porcelain and silver, with the dainty smiling grace which gives an additional savor to the delicacies served by a woman's hand.

"May I give you some coffee, Monsieur Malézeau?"

And the sugar, deftly seized with the tongs, was dropped into the cup whence arose a hot, aromatic vapor. The liquors were under Aunt Isabelle's care, and it was with the air of a *gendarme* that she marshalled her decanters.

"A glass of kummel, Monsieur Malézeau?"

"Thank you, mademoiselle, but if you will allow me, I will take some fine champagne. An old habit, mademoiselle, but I do not care for all the new liquors."

"As you choose! We don't invite you to lunch to make you eat and drink what you don't like. As for you, Robert, I sha'n't offer you anything. You want to learn moderation," and she bestowed a meaning glance upon her nephew.

But the young man adroitly captured the decanter, and, retreating a few steps:

"What, aunt, do you mean to try and wean me?" he said. "I'm too old now."

"Well, only one glass, you bad boy."

"Only one tiny one!" And pouring the coffee out of his cup, he filled it to the brim with the liquor.

In the free life he led of a country gentleman, Robert had acquired violent habits and appetites which now it was very difficult for him to resist. His athletic temperament allowed him to indulge with impunity in the excesses which follow a hunting-dinner, when, fatigued by the day's run, men sit round the table long into the evening, drinking and smoking. The young count was known as the deepest drinker in the province—a fame of which he was exceedingly proud—and in the excitement of a debauch he had accepted many absurd wagers, as, for instance, to drink a stated number of cups of what is called "four-colored coffee," a terrible mixture of brandy, chartreuse, kirsch and absinthe, calculated to turn the strongest brain.

But his head and stomach alike withstood these tests, and he felt a silly pride when anyone said to him: "Clairefont, you could stand any amount of drink." It was the glory of this broad-shouldered fellow to be able to hold his own against all drunkards in the department.

He had commenced to drink from ostentation, and gradually the habit had grown on him, and he became fond of it. On Sundays he was not above going to Pourtois' inn where he played bowls and hob-nobbed with the



young men of the town. People did not treat him, as they had treated his father, when he was young, with respectful awe; but then what a difference there was between this gigantic, florid, noisy, familiarity-inviting Clairefont and the little, thin, correct, exquisitely polite Clairefont, who knew so well how to keep people at a distance! They were as opposite as day and night, and often people wondered by what miracle of nature this son had been born of such a father.

At first, Robert's intemperate habits had given his father great uneasiness, and he descended from the clouds of his scientific inventions to gravely consider this exceedingly terrestrial question. He severely reprimanded his son, but he found that he had reckoned without Aunt Isabelle, who came at once to the rescue.

The old scold managed to find divers arguments to palliate her nephew's misconduct. What! all this fuss about a few bumpers of wine! Their ancestors had drunk a good deal harder, and had the marquis forgotten the Clairefont who in the time of Louis XIII. had outdone Bassompierre by drinking his two jack-boots full of wine? And did the *roues* of the Regency stint themselves at the Palais-Royal parties? And a whole series of historical *bons vivants*, drinking-cup, goblet or glass in hand, was made to pass before the eyes of the marquis, protesting against his strait-lacedness and proclaiming the aristocratic sovereignty of the table. Besides, after all, the boy was young, and if he did amuse himself a little with his friends, where was the harm? He must be allowed to sow his wild oats.

"He is welcome to sow them, but he needn't drown them," said Honoré.

"Eh, my dear brother, your son is not a delicate, weakly man like you!" cried Aunt Isabelle. "He's a 'Golius.'"

The marquis spoke very seriously to Robert, who promised to be more sober. But the habit was too strong for him, and as soon as he found himself seated before some old bottles with some fellow-sportsmen, he laughed, became excited, and forgot all his good resolutions.

The most serious feature in the case was that, harmless as a lamb under ordinary circumstances, he became dangerous as a wolf when the least intoxicated, and prudent people kept well out of his reach at such times. The previous year there had been a very disagreeable episode. After a dinner at the opening of the shooting season, at which the exploits of all the sportsmen present had been copiously toasted, he had half killed a stableman who had by mistake harnessed another guest's horse to his gig. The man



had been confined to his bed for six weeks, and the count, in his bitter regret, had solemnly vowed to himself to avoid all parties where there was any danger of temptation. For a year now he had kept his vow, and Aunt Isabelle, as proud of her nephew's good conduct as she had been indulgent to his follies, helped him by continual exhortations to persevere in his praiseworthy course.

The old maid, who simply idolized the only male offshoot of the noble house, would have turned the world upside down for Robert's sake. As she watched him now tapping his spoon on the sugar which refused to melt in the brandy, she was all the time admiring his muscular beauty. His shoulders were broad, his waist slender, his powerful arms were terminated by small hands, while two clear blue eyes shone out of his manly face, which was tanned and reddened by the open air. His hair and eyebrows were dark chestnut color, while his moustache was very fair, a contrast which gave a singular expression of gentleness to his face.

His sister formed the most complete contrast to him. In her, all was delicacy and grace, and the two races which were incarnated in the pair, were very clearly defined. The brother was a huge Saint-Maurice, with gross material tastes. The sister was a Clairefont, delicate, dreamy, and slightly fanciful, which, perhaps, was the reason why she was so devoted to her father.

For the last few moments the lawyer had been walking up and down with evident impatience, scrunching the gravel beneath his feet, and wandering from the arbor to the edge of the terrace and back again in an agitated, nervous way, as if he longed to plunge into a matter of some difficulty and yet had not the courage.

The marquis was apparently absorbed in a pleasant vision as he sat with a smile on his face abstractedly beating a march on the stone table before him. In what happy memories and what bright hopes was the old man lost? To what ethereal sphere, to what celestial land, had he been transported by a dream?

He made an abrupt gesture, and struck his hand upon his knee, while his cheeks flushed with a happy glow:

"My furnace with its circulating currents of air will save eighty per cent. of the amount of fuel used in other furnaces!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "And it will consume all the waste material and all the substances hitherto considered as useless. Ah, ah, Malézeau, we'll see what you'll have to say about it! There's a mine of wealth in it!"



Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice's face darkened : folding her arms, she strode towards the marquis like a dragoon :

"Brother," she said, "this is the tenth time within a few years that you have discovered a mine."

"Oh, but this time, it is really true," replied the inventor eagerly. "The discovery I have made meets a great and long-felt want. All factories are handicapped by the increasing price of fuel, and with my system coal becomes, if not needless, at any rate of very minor importance. Shavings, wet straw, sugar-canes can all be burnt in my furnace, and the importance of that is evident, for general industries will be no longer endangered or injured by the flooding of a coal mine. As soon as I have taken out my patent, I shall have all the large factories in the world anxious to do business with me. It is a certain and immense source of income, I tell you, and so sure am I of its success that I would risk my name on the enterprise."

"A gentleman has no right to barter his name, brother," broke in his old sister-in-law, sharply.

"That is true," replied the marquis gravely. "The name I bear belongs to all those who have borne it before me, and I ought to bequeath it unstained to those after me. But its dignity would not be lessened if I added to it the honor of so grand an industrial victory."

"You know what I think of your researches. A man like you has nothing to gain, but all to lose by such things, which are only fit for workmen."

"But King Louis XVI. was a good locksmith," interposed the marquis with a smile.

"Well, and you see how much good it did him!" cried Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice triumphantly.

"I hope you don't think I shall end on the scaffold?"

"No, but you'll die on a dung-hill!"

Antoinette had gradually drawn nearer, and now she gently put her arm round Aunt Isabelle's neck.

"There, auntie, don't be unkind," she whispered; "humor papa a little."

"Oh, I dare say, you coaxer," said the old maid, whose beard was bristling with excitement, "it's you who are half to blame for your father's follies; for instead of pointing out his foolishness to him you encourage him in it, and all I can do is to tell him that we shall see him as poor as 'Jacob.' Well, do as you like, brother," she added, turning to the marquis. "But here's Monsieur Malézeau wanting to talk to you on business. Listen to what he has to say, and try and profit by his advice."

At the word "business" Robert had taken a step in the



direction of the house, while the marquis gave his lawyer a look full of smiling serenity, and taking his daughter's arm with caressing indolence, he said :

"Well, Malézeau, I am at your service. Would you like us to go indoors?"

"I should certainly prefer it, sir. I have certain accounts to submit, sir, which will need your closest attention."

"Then, we will go to my study," answered Monsieur de Clairefont, "and I will show you the model of my furnace, Malézeau. You will see how simple it is, but the idea was everything. An idea may be everything, or it may be nothing, Aunt Isabelle."

"Oh, all right," growled the old maid. "It isn't ideas that you want, only as a rule they are so queer and absurd that no one can make anything out of them."

She crossed over to the lawyer, who was following Monsieur and Mademoiselle de Clairefont.

"Is it anything very serious, Malézeau?" she asked with an inward agitation that made her loud, hearty voice tremble. "It is a long while since we last saw you, and there must be something serious the matter to make you come without being summoned."

The lawyer bent his head in token of assent.

Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice shuddered. For several years she had been accustomed to the remonstrances that the lawyer periodically addressed to his noble client, and each time that Malézeau had come to Clairefont, the family possessions had been diminished by a few acres of land or some of the woods. To-day all was mortgaged. The estate was giving way beneath the burden of interests that must be paid—let the weight receive but the smallest addition, and it would crumble to ruins.

"For heaven's sake, don't advance him any more," said Aunt Isabelle. "He is bound up in his new scheme, and he will be sure to ask you for money. Resist his entreaties—look upon it as a matter of conscience. Honoré is simply a 'prodigious' son, Malézeau. Ah, how willingly would we kill the fatted calf if he would only give up his mad ideas!"

"You may depend on me, mademoiselle. I am determined to be very firm, mademoiselle, as you will see."

Arrived at the top of the steps, the marquis turned round. Before him stretched the quiet, smiling valley, bathed in light; between the verdant meadows flowed the silvery river, bordered on either side by thick and stunted willows, while the slates and tiles of the houses shone in



the sun amidst the dark foliage of the trees. For a moment the old man leaned on the iron rail contemplating the peaceful picture. Ardently he inhaled the pure air until his lungs were filled with it. The tears sprang to his eyes, and he whispered to himself:

"Peace and quiet amidst this beautiful country—the calm joy of a life spent in the bosom of my family—perhaps that would have been true happiness after all. But each one must fulfill his destiny."

He shook his head, and noticing that the lawyer had lingered to talk to Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice:

"Malézeau," he called, "I am ready when you are." And he went into the drawing-room.

Robert strode along towards the left wing, where there was a staircase in one of the pointed towers which flanked the main body of the house, leading to his rooms. Gayly whistling a hunting song, he walked down the long passage on which the household offices opened, and passed the immense kitchen with its huge chimney-piece, where there was a spit so long that a calf could have been roasted whole on it. The young man gave a friendly greeting to the servant, and, turning to the right, was just about to mount the stone stairs, when the sound of bursts of laughter mingled with the dull thud of regular blows attracted his attention.

He went a few steps farther on, and pausing at a door which stood ajar, he saw beside a window, on which was perched the red-haired shepherd boy, Rose Chassevant ironing. The thud was caused by her iron which every now and then she rested on a thickly-folded blanket scorched and burnt all over, and as she talked to her wild companion she went on just as quickly with her work.

The poacher's daughter looked charming, and as Roussot sat, with his knees drawn up to his chin and his eyes fixed on Rose with admiring covetousness, he seemed like a crouching wolf on the point of springing upon his victim. From time to time he uttered a hoarse exclamation, but never pronouncing a word except when he was absolutely forced to do so, as if his muteness were rather the result of indolence than infirmity. Rose had ceased her laughter, and now she was talking to him with the suspicion of a Normandy accent in her tones, which gave such piquancy to her utterances.

"No, Roussot, you are not tidy enough in your person," she said. "Look—your trousers are all torn and your shirt is gray with dust. Besides, you smell of your sheep, and it isn't nice for a girl."



The shepherd gave vent to a growl, his little, crafty eyes flashed, and apparently making a tremendous effort, he articulated :

“ Handsome at the fair. ”

“ Ah, you are preparing a surprise, are you ? ” cried the girl, pushing her hot iron rapidly over the hem. “ Well, if only you make yourself presentable, I will dance with you, like I do with the others. ”

Roussot made no answer, and his lips contracted viciously. For a few seconds there was an expression of horrible bestiality on his face, then he burst into a laugh which was broken and jerky as if he had hiccoughs.

“ Ah, that’s pleased you, hasn’t it, my lad ? ” said Rose. “ But it’s no reason why you should sit on that window all day doing nothing. It would be as well for you to go and look after your sheep, for if you were caught here— ”

Robert’s appearance prevented the ending of her sentence. The shepherd gave a shrill whistle, unfolded his legs like two springs, with the adroitness of a monkey, and leaping out of the window, turned in the direction of the stables.

“ Now, I’ve caught you chatting with your sweetheart, ” said the count, seating himself on the end of the ironing-board. “ You needn’t be so proud with me when you are so good-natured to the ugliest farm lad. ”

“ Now, Monsieur Robert, ” said Rose coquettishly, “ have you come to the laundry to make a scene ? ”

“ Good gracious, no ! I was going upstairs to my own room when I heard you talking to that young vagabond ; but I will not have disturbed you for nothing, ” and so saying, he stretched out his arm, caught the girl round the waist and dropped a kiss upon her snowy neck.

“ I did not ask you for that, ” said the pretty laundress, rearranging her kerchief. “ If you kiss the daughter, you shouldn’t be so hard on the father. What have I just heard about you and poor Chassevent ? ”

“ Look here, Rose, ” he answered, “ if you want us to keep good friends, don’t talk to me about that scoundrel. ”

“ And don’t you come talking to me, if you treat him as you do ! ” exclaimed Rose, with crimsoning cheeks.

“ Come, come, don’t be naughty, ” said the count, edging nearer to her ; and taking her arm he began gently caressing it. Rose still continued to pout and kept her eyes obstinately fixed upon her work, but a smile began to hover round her lips. Her fair, fluffy hair curled upwards from her pretty neck, and inside the loose collar a glimpse could be caught of the curve of her shoulders,



with the skin as velvety as a ripe peach.

"And if you liked, how well everything could be arranged!" she said, suddenly raising her eyes to Robert. "Father loves the woods and is mad over game—why don't you take him as keeper? Then he'd give over snaring your hares, and you've enough rabbits to keep him without missing any. The old house at La Saucelle is empty, and I could go and live there with him. It would be handier for me to come here of a day, and I can't tell you how pleased it would make me!"

The count's lip approached Rose's cheek without encountering any resistance this time, and brushing her little mouth with his long moustache, he answered:

"That isn't a bad idea of yours, and it could all be easily managed, if that old vagabond Chassevent wasn't the most determined rogue within ten miles. But my preserves would be well kept by him who is the boon companion of all the poachers in the parish! No, no, my dear, I can't provide your father with a dwelling, unless it is the cell of a prison, which would be to your advantage; for there he wouldn't be able to take your money or knock you about."

"Is that what you think?" exclaimed Rose, furiously tearing herself from the young man's embrace. "Well, then, I forbid you to come near me, and if you dare to touch as much as a fold of my dress, I'll tell Mademoiselle Antoinette about you—there now!"

"Bravo, my pet! Virtue makes you prettier than ever; you must persevere with it," said Robert, laughing. "See, look at your red-haired lover watching you over there."

Consumed with eager, jealous curiosity, Roussot was slouching about the yard, his piercing eyes fixed on the laundry window, and the sharp, crafty expression on his face just then, would have very much surprised the people who looked upon him as an idiot. Seeing that he was observed, he turned away, put on a look of stupidity, and began to crack his whip as loudly as he could, as was his usual way of amusing himself.

"Roussot is a poor lad who would not hurt a fly and for whom I am very sorry," said Rose sharply. "It is wrong of you to laugh at him, Monsieur Robert. He was taken into your father's household when he was found deserted on the roadside, and he and I have grown up together since we were children. *He* wouldn't say anything bad about my father, I'm sure."

"Well, there, let's make it up," responded Robert, gently pinching and pulling her sun-burnt ear. "We'll



see if something can't be done to please you without injuring the preserves."

The girl's face brightened, her lips curved in a smile, and offering her cheek to the young man with coaxing coquettishness, she said:

"Oh, you can be so nice when you like."

He caught her in his arms and kissed her eagerly, but she freed herself with a cry, and turning rather pale:

"Ah, you hurt me," she said. "Do not squeeze me so tightly; you are so strong, and you could stifle me without ever meaning to."

"And that would be a thousand pities," put in a deep voice.

Robert turned round angrily to see Tondeur's red and grinning face at the window.

"Your servant, Monsieur Robert," said the merry old fellow. "By jingo, you know what's good!" And he went off into a hearty laugh which made his face turn violet.

"What do you want here?" asked the count, roughly.

"Something which concerns you more than it does me, Monsieur Robert. As I was going round the clearings just now, I found a nest of musket-hawks, and I came straight away to tell you."

"Thanks, very much," said Robert, altering his tone. "Just wait for me, will you, while I get my gun."

"Mind you don't forget what you have promised me," cried Rose after him, noisily moving her irons.

"We'll see about it! Wait for me, Tondeur."

And the young count ran lightly up the staircase.

"What has he promised you, Rosie?" asked the timber merchant, leaning his great hairy hands on the window-sill. "To marry you?"

"You old stupid!" returned the pretty laundress. "Oh, there's Monsieur Malézeau just going out—go and ask him if he has been told to draw up the wedding-contract yet."

The lawyer was walking across the court-yard, accompanied by the marquis who was talking with a great deal of animation.

"Yes, for fifty thousand francs I could take out the patent, and then I could make known my discovery and realize enormous profits. Do you hear, Malézeau?"

"I hear, and I understand, sir; it is all very clear, sir. But where are you to get these fifty thousand francs; since, sir, you run the risk of being turned out of your house, if, sir, you do not pay a debt of a hundred and



sixty-three thousand francs next week."

"Where shall I get them from? Why from you, my dear fellow. You surely will not let me lose so much for the sake of so small a sum as that! Fifty thousand francs! And it means wealth. Come, lend it to me."

"I have no money of my own, sir, and as for that of my clients, honor as well as the law forbids me to dispose of it. Take my advice—give up the immediate realization of your plans, and turn all your energies to finding a means of escape from the position in which you are placed. Believe me, it is very serious—"

"Oh, I'll get out of it, I'll answer for that; but it won't be by economizing—it will be by my invention which will save us all. I must have fifty thousand francs—on a second mortgage—eh?"

"You will not obtain the sum, sir. Your credit in the province is exhausted, and if I had not arranged everything for you up to now, you would not have been able to borrow a halfpenny for a long time past, sir."

"Oh, well, I expect my future son-in-law this evening, and I will ask him to lend me the money."

For a moment Malézeau hesitated, then said:

"If you do, sir, he will go away never to return, sir. Will you yourself furnish him with a pretext for breaking off this marriage which has been delayed so long?"

"What are you talking about, Malézeau? Do you for an instant suppose that Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil is not disposed to fulfill his engagement? If I thought that to be the case, I should be far from regretting my daughter's hesitation to marry him, and besides, when I am in a position to give her a princely dowry—as I shall be—she will not want for suitors. Well, since I find you so determined, I must turn out all my pockets and try to manage without your help. All I ask you to do is to try and temporize. See my creditors—"

"Sir," interposed the attorney, "you have but one."

"Ah?" said Monsieur de Clairefont, and all the animation died out of his face and voice. "And," he added with painful anxiety, "this one creditor is—"

"Carvaján," said the attorney, bending his head despondingly.

"Has he then paid off all the others?"

"Yes, sir, he has quietly bought up every one of your bills and promissory notes. He wished you to have no one but himself to deal with, sir."

All the inventor's illusions were dissipated in an instant. His heart turned cold; there came a singing in



his ears and a darkness before his eyes, as if the sky had suddenly turned black.

His son's voice recalled him to himself. The young man was going out, his gun on his shoulder, accompanied by his sister, and both were bright and joyous in the careless, happy fashion of youth. Antoinette cried out:

"Will you come with us, papa? We are going to the clearing with Monsieur Tondeur."

"No, my dear, I must go in and work."

He watched them go with a look of tender sadness in his eyes, and noted with fond pride the easy, upright carriage and broad shoulders of his son, and the graceful, elegant outlines of his daughter. Would he not rather fight for their present and their future?

The blood rushed to his brain. He was endowed with fresh energy, he felt capable of performing marvels, but, unhappily, it was in his hazardous speculations that he sought salvation, and when he had yet the chance, with patient and strict economy, of righting himself and overcoming his financial difficulties, he prepared to descend still lower into the gulf which was slowly and surely swallowing up his fortune.

"Only get Carvajan to give me time," he said to the lawyer, "and all will be right. You see these turrets and these roofs? Well, before long I shall be able to cover them with gold if the fancy takes me."

He began to laugh and nod his white head, and, with a gesture of farewell to Malézeau, he returned to his laboratory.

## CHAPTER IV.

It had not been without a feeling of deep emotion that Pascal had seen La Neuville once again. He had left it little more than a child, and he returned a man. During the long hours of his lonely life abroad, he had often turned his thoughts to the causes which had led to his departure, and not once had he been troubled by a regret. He had done what he had ought to have done. Forced by circumstances to judge and condemn his father, he fled as though to punish himself for his want of respect. Absence and time stretched a veil between his memory and Carvajan's terrible face, until at last its features appeared to him with their hardness softened or effaced.

During these years of exile which he passed alone amidst the crowded cities of foreign lands, he had grown passionately fond of his distant country and his forsaken



home. He had written regularly to his father telling him of his work and his hopes, and Carvaján, with the exactitude of a man accustomed to trade, had sent him short, cold, concise answers which were simply business letters with hardly a word of affection dropped in at the end. Always sound, practical advice, given with marvellous intuition of his son's position, but never a word which could be construed into an allusion to the past or a hint about the future. Never, in a moment of loneliness or melancholy, had Carvaján given way to the instinctive longing of old age for help and support, and written to his son: "Come back." His rough, proud obstinacy was strongly betrayed in his dealing with Pascal. The latter had wished to go, had withdrawn himself from all paternal authority, and he could make what use he liked of his liberty with perfect unrestraint.

But when the day came when, tired of wandering over the world and having finished the work he had undertaken, the young man sent word to announce his speedy return, he received from his father in reply a note short as usual, but which gave evidence of an unexpected satisfaction. It touched Pascal deeply. He rejoiced to think that the old man was glad to see his son again, and that his cold, hard heart was softened by a faint ray of joy.

Thus Pascal set off with twofold delight—that of returning to his native land and that of finding his father gentler and more kind. Accustomed as he was to journeys of several weeks' duration and the slow means of conveyance in countries that were hardly yet civilized, the short crossing from America to France seemed long to him, and the railway journey interminable. He was in such a fever of impatience that he hardly gave himself time to deliver his reports to the firm in Paris before he set out for La Neuville, where he arrived in the evening.

His heart beat fast as he got out of the train, and he walked along the platform in an agitation he vainly attempted to repress. His eyes, dimmed by tears, did not see at first a little man who was waiting, upright and stiff, just outside the railway station, but suddenly there were two simultaneous exclamations.

"Pascal!"

"Father!" And they fell in each other's arms.

The mayor of La Neuville, quickly recovering from his emotion, gave some brief orders to the porters about the luggage, which was to be taken to the Rue du Marché; then, slipping his hand beneath his son's arm, led him through the town, absently acknowledging the greetings



he received from passers-by, hastening his steps to avoid the importunate and keeping up a continuous flow of questions about the business-matters entrusted to Pascal's care, eagerly anxious as to the results, indifferent to the means employed to obtain those results.

They dined and passed the evening *tete-a-tete*, Carvaján watching the young man and finding a strange pleasure in listening to the deep voice which touched a chord in the old man's heart that he had never felt vibrate before. He admired his son, he thought him clever, brilliant, superior, and when Pascal told him that he had come back with six hundred thousand francs, the amount for which he had sold his share in the transactions he had brought to so successful a termination, the banker uttered a cry of joy. But almost immediately his face darkened, his tone became cold, his gestures lost their animation, for the thought flashed through his brain: "Rich, my son can do without me. I shall have no hold over him."

Carvaján was essentially a man to rule, and for him to take an interest in anyone it was necessary for that person to be dependent on him.

"What is this strange impression he is producing upon me?" thought the banker. "There is some irresistible power in his speech, and as I listen to him I find it difficult not to agree with all his opinions. Shall I—but it is only a momentary effect, it will pass away in a few days."

The traveller was tired, and it was at an early hour that he rose to seek his room. His father himself led the way to the first story, along the dark passages and narrow staircase of the little house, pausing at last before a door which Pascal recognized as his mother's room.

"I thought you would be more comfortable here than in the room you used to have," he said.

More comfortable! Was that all that he had thought of when he prepared for his son his mother's room? He had not foreseen the tender melancholy which would inevitably steal over Pascal.

Pascal was up and dressed by an early hour the following morning, but his father had risen still earlier, and had already left the house to see to some business matters. His absence was somewhat of a relief to the young man, who longed to visit every nook and cranny of the house where his childhood had been passed.

Slowly he went downstairs. On the staircase he met a servant at whom he cast a careless glance, only to be surprised at her beauty. She was a girl of about twenty, with dark hair, a fair complexion and blue eyes, and



there was something coquettish about her dress. She was carrying up a large copper jug of water, and she greeted him with a smile.

"Perhaps you are looking for your father, Monsieur Pascal," she said. "He went out soon after daybreak to go to his farm at La Moncelle, and he won't be back before twelve o'clock, so if you would like to go for a little walk, you have plenty of time, and it will give you an appetite."

Pascal turned out of the house into the fresh cool air, where the swallows were chasing each other high up towards the blue sky. He walked up to Couvrechamps, wandered along the leafy paths, and lost himself in the meadows, inhaling with delight the strong odors of his native soil, dazzled by the sun, intoxicated by the perfumes borne to him on the breeze, and unconscious of the fate which was leading him to the shady lane along which the beautiful horsewoman was riding, dreamy and alone.

And thus it happened that he, who the day before had been heart-whole and filled with but the one desire to forget the past and to accommodate himself to the present by closing his eyes to everything he must otherwise condemn, found himself in an instant placed in a position where he would be forced to face such a tempest as he had never faced before. An unknown power swept down and took possession of him, subjugating him and making him its slave; and so for a second time he found himself opposed to his father.

He had heard truly when he was told that he had come in time to see the battle at its height. Clairefont was pitted against Carvajan, and the duel, commenced thirty years before, had reached the stage when one or the other of the combatants must fall. Pascal knew now all the details of what had taken place between his father and the marquis, for Fleury had told him the whole story as they walked down the hill-side together. He was able to fill up the gaps in the narrative by the aid of his own recollections, and many details which had impressed him as a child, and which he had not then understood, became clear to him now. He saw Carvajan and Clairefont engaged in an implacable warfare like a modern Montagu and Capulet, though the means they employed were different as were the time, the country and the customs. It was 1880, and at La Neuville, instead of 1300, and Verona. The weapons were no longer the sword and the dagger, but the equally terrible one, money. There was no blood drawn—blood which would spurt forth and be seen, but



honor was assailed, and reputation injured by stabs in the dark. It was not an open, stirring, declared hostility, but a dull, patient, hypocritical struggle, more dangerous and more bitter than a brave hand-to-hand encounter.

Pascal reckoned up the opposing forces and saw that they were very unequal. On the one side there was the marquis, a tender-hearted, weak-minded old man, unable to calculate or foresee, tossed hither and thither by his Utopian schemes and continually sacrificing the substance for the shadow; while, on the other was Carvajan, hard-hearted and hard-headed, never taking a step unless he was sure of whither it would lead, but having once taken it, never retracing it. It was a dwarf fighting against a giant and the victory was a foregone conclusion.

Pascal knew by what means the confederates were preparing to obtain this victory, for, secretly interested as he was in the defence, he was in the very centre of the attacking body. He saw them all laboring like a lot of ants greedily stripping some dead animal of its flesh till only the bones are left white and clean. He knew what they had gained already. Tondeur had bought the saw-mills in the La Saucelle woods—those famous steam saw-mills which had so lowered the wages of wood-cutters. Dumontier, Carvajan's brother-in-law, had lent a hundred and twenty thousand francs, receiving as security a mortgage on the fertile meadows through which flows the river Thelle. Fleury, Carvajan's tool, the Père Joseph of this Richelieu, had advanced no money, but he merited a share of the spoil for the good service he was continually rendering as magistrate's clerk, and by doing duty as appraiser and auctioneer at sales for debt in which nearly all the banker's loans resulted. Pourtois coveted the land which lay immediately around his inn, and aspired to seeing work resumed at the Great Marl-Pit; for since the furnaces in the lime-kilns had been extinguished and the workmen dismissed, there had been a considerable falling off in his receipts, and his dining tables were empty.

As for Carvajan himself, he would be content with nothing less than Honoré de Clairefont's lands, money, happiness and honor. The most complete catastrophe seemed hardly sufficient in his eyes. He longed to see this man, who had humiliated him, at his feet that he might trample on him, and to this exquisite moral pleasure he did not disdain to add the material satisfaction of having made a very profitable speculation; for he was always practical, even in his vengeance. Possessor of the Clairefont estates, he was master of the surrounding



districts. He could lead opinion, become a member of the General Council, be elected deputy, and, by working the Great Marl-Pit with the developments and improvements he would be able to effect, he could create an industrial power which must necessarily assure its founder a boundless future.

Since Pascal's return, the banker had been quite different. He altered his habits, would stop to talk to people in the streets, and was never tired of saying how glad he was to have his son with him again. The house in the Rue du Marché quite changed its appearance. The windows, which were generally closed, were thrown wide open, and the whole abode lost its air of mystery and suspicion. And what was still more extraordinary, Carvaján prepared to entertain his friends.

"I do not wish my son to feel the time pass tediously in my house," he said to those who expressed a little surprise. "He is young and needs amusement. For an old fellow like me, the house is cheerful enough, but for him it wants livening up, and I should like to see some ladies in it. Pascal is thirty now, and it's time he thought about marrying."

He had become suddenly filled with this idea of marrying his son. He was always ready to talk about it, and busied himself incessantly about putting it into execution.

He had paid all sorts of unwonted attentions to the Leglorieux, the rich millers of Capendu, and when Madame and Mademoiselle Leglorieux received an invitation to dinner from the mayor of La Neuville, they crimsoned with delight. Then they hurried off to Rouen, and spent two hours with Mademoiselle Siméon, the milliner in the Rue Beauvoisine, and the best dress-maker in the town. Madame Leglorieux' daughter was a tall, handsome girl of about twenty, and a splendid type of the Normandy race, with her white skin, magnificent hair, and large hands and feet. She was the only child, and Fleury, who knew within a few hundred francs how much every one in the neighborhood possessed, often said: "Ah, she'll be well off one of these days."

Madame Leglorieux, trembling with hope, had at once opened her heart to her daughter.

"My dear," she said, "it must be a marriage that is in question; for it is the first time Monsieur Carvaján has ever invited ladies to his house. Oh, Félicie, think of it! He has millions, and his son is so nice. They say that as a barrister he is extremely clever—far more so than Monsieur Bonnet. If he would come and live at Rouen, he



might easily become senior advocate, and you would dine at the Prefecture!"

Mademoiselle Félicie made no reply, but her eyes shone, and there was a bright red spot on each of her cheeks.

And yet Pascal, directly his father allowed him a moment to himself, turned his footsteps in the direction of Clairefont. Twice he went in the evening to the lane where he had met Antoinette, and, hiding behind the hedge, seated himself in the clover, which was yet warm from the last rays of the sun, and waited. But the beautiful horsewoman was no longer visible. Then he was bold enough to go close up to the park-gates, and the large Scotch deerhound, stretched lazily among the shrubs where he had scratched a hole to try and find a cool place, raised his long nose and gave vent to one or two barks of vexation. The young man crouched down by the park-wall, fearing he might be seen, and, in the silence he heard Antoinette's musical voice, saying:

"Be quiet, Fox. It is only some beggar; are you going to show your teeth at poor people?"

"If he does, he'll show them to us one of these days," added the harsh voice of Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice.

These words cut Pascal to the heart. They formed a far more impassable separation between Mademoiselle de Clairefont and himself than the stones of the high park-wall; for was it not Carvajan who was bringing about this ruin!

He walked slowly away. Night was drawing on; a slight mist was creeping over the woods. The young man followed the edge of the common where he had seen Rose washing her linen, and on it he saw Roussot's flock of sheep browsing on the scanty herbage under the guardianship of the black dog. The shepherd was stretched out on a low wall near the fold which was open for the night, and was blowing through a hollow elder stalk that he had formed into a primitive flute, from which he drew a shrill, plaintive sound that died away in the air like the cry of a wounded bird.

Pascal's vicinity was soon discovered by the idiot, who, leaping to his feet, uttered two strident shouts which his dog at once obeyed by gathering together the scattered sheep. Then, seizing his whip, Roussot began furiously to gesticulate, as if the passer-by had committed a grave crime in even approaching his sheep, and for a long while Pascal heard the hill re-echoing with the sharp cracking of the whip, alternating with the shepherd's shouts.

He reached home feeling sad at the heart, although he



had only been back in La Neuville a week. Carvajan at once noticed the change in his son. He said:

"What is the matter with you? Is there something or some one here you don't like? If so, it shall be altered, my boy. I want you to be happy."

Pascal looked at his father, and thought him sincere. "He has grown gentler as he has grown older," he thought. "Perhaps he really would do a great deal to please me," and he resolved to take advantage of his softened mood and tell him all.

There might yet be time to turn aside the blow with which Clairefont was threatened. If only the return of the son who had been a wanderer over the globe for so long, could be the signal for the cessation of hostilities! Oh, with what affection would he repay his father, if for his sake he would consent to spare his vanquished enemies! He thought of Antoinette freed from her cares, able at last to smile, and of how it would be to him that the young girl would owe her father's safety and her own peace of mind. A flood of tender pity swept over him at the thought, and he determined to make the attempt at once.

"Father," he said, "since I have come home, I have not been able to help admiring the changes that have been effected. Here I find you the first man in the town, but although you already hold a high position, I see that it is not yet as high as it may be."

Here Carvajan bent his head in token of acknowledgment, while his bronze face expanded in a silent laugh.

"Still I can see one dark cloud on the horizon," continued Pascal, "and that is the state of enmity in which you live with the occupants of Clairefont. Do you think it is worthy of you to prolong a struggle which agitates the whole neighborhood? For, all those who are not on your side are on theirs, and you are setting the whole place at variance."

The banker answered with grim irony:

"I shall not do so much longer, now."

Pascal would not be deceived by this reply.

"I hear it said on all sides that the Marquis Honoré is at the end of his resources, and that is what encourages me to speak to you so plainly, although I know the subject is displeasing to you. Here are some unfortunate people, who by dint of ignorance, eccentricity, folly—call the cause what you will—have arrived at the verge of utter ruin. For the wrong they have done you, father, what greater punishment can you wish them?"



An expression of terrible glee stole over Carvajan's face.

"Boy," he said, with contemptuous pity, "you do not understand what you are talking about."

There was so much bitter irony in these few words; they were so thoroughly the utterance of an insatiable vengeance, that they froze Pascal to the heart. He had hoped to persuade Carvajan to alter his course, or at least to provoke a discussion which would have some favorable result, and he found his father cold and hard as marble, and replying with the superior indulgence of a man talking to a child. Still he returned to the charge.

"There can be no doubt that the Marquis de Clairefont is but a sorry adversary for so powerful a combatant as yourself."

"He, he!" returned Carvajan scoffingly. "If the marquis had only repeated that to himself every evening before going to bed, for the last thirty years, perhaps he wouldn't be in the plight he is now."

"But he is old—"

"Ah, by the way, he is just my age."

"And there are women in his family worthy of consideration."

At these words, Carvajan started to his feet, and looking sharply at his son, said in a harsh metallic voice—his real voice—which made Pascal's nerves vibrate:

"Women? Who told you so? Or perhaps you have seen them? We shall get into a pretty state if they are to be mixed up in our affairs! Women! Are there not always women where the marquis is concerned? And is it in the old Demoiselle de Saint-Maurice that you take so deep an interest, or the beautiful Antoinette?"

The young girl's name, uttered with such rough familiarity, rang painfully on the young man's ear. To him the accent with which his father pronounced it, seemed a degradation, and had the latter allowed him time, he would have cut short all further comment.

"Who has been speaking to you about these women?" went on the old man with increasing excitement. "Or do you happen to have met them? You have been walking all over the country ever since you have come back and they are always on the roads, like the adventuresses that they are. Perhaps they have even spoken to you? They have not much shame about them, and then Carvajan's son—what an opportunity!" And the banker ended with a horrible laugh.

"Father, I implore you—"



"Be quiet! Do you think I don't know them? You should beware of them; they're very sharp—the young one especially, with her innocent airs and her cavalry captain who won't come to the scratch! You take my word for it, my boy, they're a bad lot; and don't you have anything to do with them—you'll only be taken in. It wanted old Carvajan to get to the bottom of them, and it wasn't an easy job for him. If you are afraid of the noise that the downfall of that crumbling old ruin, which calls itself the house of Clairefont will make, go to Paris for a little while—you are young and you ought to amuse yourself. But take my advice and never try to alter the position of the ninepins I set up. I certainly like you very well, but all the same you might get a nasty knock when I am bowling. Besides," he added, with mock good humor, "you need not be so sensitive. The marquis has others with him besides women—he has a big fellow of twenty-eight or thirty, strong as a bull, although until now he has only wasted his strength on follies. But if he wishes to work, he can do so, and you and I know how people can get on. I began by sweeping out old Gatelier's shop, and you, you obstinate fellow, have been all round the world. What is there to hinder this fine youth from building up the family fortunes again? He, he! perhaps we misjudge the boy! Who knows but what he has another vocation than that of stunning a stableman and thrashing a poacher, between drinks? I should be delighted to find that he had hidden capacities, and to see him prove one fine day that he is good for something."

Carvajan paused, and his face grew hard and dark.

"But if," he went on, "he is at once useless and harmful, like all his family, then he must fall and disappear. There is no room in society, as it is now constituted, for the vicious and the idle."

After so rough a repulse, Pascal tried to divert his father's thoughts by assuming an air of utter indifference. He had only been led to speak by scruples which were, perhaps, excessive. The Clairefont family were nothing to him; he did not know them and did not wish to do so. Carvajan let him talk on without a word, but he resolved to have Pascal watched by some one whom he could trust and who would know how to follow up the clue given him. But even as he was thinking this, Pascal suspected something of the kind and determined not to walk again in the direction of Clairefont until some time had elapsed.

The dinner to which the mayor had invited all the leading men of La Neuville to celebrate his son's return



was a very splendid affair; for there is no one like a miser to spend upon occasion. The guests were waited upon by waiters from Rouen, whose appearance had so imposing an effect upon the elder Dumontier, Carvajan's brother-in-law, that every time one of them changed his plate he could not help saying: "Thank you, sir," in spite of the furious glances darted at him by his wife.

Commenced in great solemnity in the sombre dining-room which had been denuded of all superfluous furniture for the occasion; for there were twenty-two at table, the dinner became gradually gayer until the glasses were filled with Burgundy, when the tongues were thoroughly loosened and the conversation became extremely noisy.

Fleury, who was only separated from the son of the house by Mademoiselle Leglorieux, attempted to draw out the young man, and with that object began to talk about America. But he found all his attempts useless. Pascal's surroundings were detestable to him, and the prospect of living with these people, whose manners, language and ideas were so revolting to him, seemed intolerable. Carvajan, cold and severe, sober in gesture and words, had the proud, menacing distinction of a prince compared to his companions.

Mademoiselle Leglorieux, red and full-blown as a peony, sat beside him, mincing and tossing her head, endeavoring to be elegant, raising her glass to her lips, with her little finger held stiffly out, picking and choosing her words and making a display of ridiculous affectation. Tondeur, squeezed into a black coat which was making him endure torture, had turned violet and was accompanying every sally of Fleury's with an asthmatical, wheezy laugh. Madame Leglorieux was pouring fully detailed confidences into Carvajan's ear about her daughter's talents and the legacies she had to expect from her two great-uncles, the rich farmers of Bray.

"Yes, sir, I can truthfully say that Félicie will be a first-class match, such as could not be found elsewhere in in the whole canton. Thank God, her father and I are strong and healthy, but all the same she will have three hundred thousand francs the day she marries. And do you know what she is called in La Neuville? The heiress! You see, she will have so much without counting what we shall leave her, as far in the future as possible, of course!"

She began to laugh, and the black corkscrew curls which hung on each side of her face, danced as if they were on springs, while Carvajan looked at and listened to her with an expression of utter tranquillity.



It struck Pascal, who was straining his ears to listen to her, to compare the mother and daughter, and he was amazed to find how deplorably great was the resemblance. They had the same figure, the same color, the same features. In Madame Leglorieux, he had a picture of what Félicie would be at forty, when her figure had developed, her complexion become mottled, her eyes bloated and her intellect dulled by a narrow, lazy, provincial life. And it was such a wife as that they intended to give him!

Then he reasoned with himself coldly and calmly. What was there so surprising in it after all? Would it not be a very suitable union, and ought he to hope for any other? The girl was of the same district and the same rank of life as himself, and could he find a better bride? He, the son of a wealthy peasant, was not destined to make such an alliance as a nobleman of old family, and he had merely given way to his imagination by looking higher than he ought.

He became unconscious of what was going on around him. He pictured himself alone in a silent, shady park, while before his eyes passed the figure of a girl, softly and mistily outlined as in a dream. She was his love, and he felt ready to make every effort to gain her. Nothing should tire his patience, nothing diminish his courage, and in the end he would wear out resistance, disarm all anger and be happy.

He quivered at the thought. What joy to feel her small hand upon his trembling arm! What bliss to pass through life with her! To see no one but her, to think of nothing but her, to melt his being into hers, and to have no longer a thought, a hope, a desire which was not centered in her. To be her husband, never to leave her but to return to throw himself more humbly at her feet—a master eager to make himself a slave. To see her reach the perfection of maternity, to have this exquisite woman the mother of his children, who would be fair, rosy, happy, imperious and coaxing as herself, and to feel his heart hardly large enough to contain all the love his darlings would inspire!

A violent acclamation aroused him from his voluptuous dream. All his father's guests had risen, and, touching each other's glasses, were drinking his safe return, while Madame Leglorieux shook her curls and gave Carvaján a triumphant look which seemed to say:

"You have brought him back. We will keep him!"

Fleury, after bowing with grovelling obsequiousness to excuse himself for taking so great a liberty, com-



menced a speech he had prepared beforehand, which he pretended to stumble over in order to give it the semblance of an impromptu effort. In it he made some thinly-veiled allusions to the struggle between Clairefont and Carvajan, insinuating that for many long years the mayor of La Neuville had been the defender of the common liberty which was threatened by the last representatives of the old feudal oppression.

"A day, which perhaps is not very far off, will come when prosperity will reign over the land as the priceless reward of this triumphant resistance," he said, in conclusion; "and this splendid result will be entirely owing to Monsieur Carvajan, the mayor of La Neuville. I will say no more, for you understand what I mean. Unite then with me in drinking the health of our esteemed and respected friend. Here's to his health."

Fleury had said truly. They were all longing to share the spoil; for it was always the Great Marl-Pit they had in view. The source of wealth would burst forth from the hillside, and each of the associates in the work of ruin would be able to draw largely from it.

Suddenly there was silence—Carvajan was about to reply. He rose to his feet, looking very grave, and the cold, measured words fell slowly from his lips. He modestly denied the honor they would do him by attributing the precious advantages the future promised to his feeble initiative; for he had had most valuable colleagues. But he was glad to have obtained general approbation; for the end that he had always kept before his eyes was solely the interests of those then around him. And he placed his hand on his heart with the unction of an apostle ready to immolate himself for the sake of humanity, and, in their delight, his guests redoubled their applause.

Pascal assisted at this scene with wondering stupor. He asked himself if he were dreaming, or if, until now, he had not been deceived by false appearances. But suddenly his eyes fell on Fleury's monkey-like face wrinkled into a silent smile, and he recalled the confidences of the magistrate's clerk. Then all that he had just seen was only a horrible comedy—all that he had heard, a shameless lie!

He felt sick with disgust. He thought of the free, true life he had been leading but a few weeks before, and again he saw the vast plains of America stretched out before him as if to invite him to their silent, verdant solitude. A sensation of fresh, wholesome repose enveloped him at the thought, and he fancied he could feel the perfumed



breeze of the savannah upon his forehead, calming the tempest of his brain. Why had he returned? What was he doing in this mire? As he tried to answer these questions, all his moral strength returned to him—the strength that in the old days would have prevented anything in the world making him an accomplice in any deed of infamy. A sudden enthusiasm filled his heart; he felt master of himself, superior to all that surrounded him, sure of being able to escape from the degradation he was being forced to share. He vowed to himself to leave all, family, friends and country, and to go and bury himself and his dreams in a land whence travellers never return. His future lay before him like a black abyss, and without a moment's hesitation, without a quiver of fear, he determined to cast his life into it.

Dinner was over, and they left the table. Carvajan's office, that room of torture whose walls had heard so many sighs and moans, was brilliantly illumined. The master's desk, cleared of its papers, had been pushed into a corner. Easy-chairs stood around the fire-place, and a piano occupied the space between the windows. The sombre, melancholy house was filled with noise and light, and out in the street the astounded rustics stood gazing at the unwonted spectacle of Carvajan's gleaming windows and listening to the sounds of a waltz that Mademoiselle Félicie was strumming.

Pascal sat in a corner, listening abstractedly to what his Uncle Dumontier was saying to him. The name of Clairefont, spoken almost in his ear, arrested his attention, and looking up, he saw his father standing talking to Monsieur Malézeau in the window by the piano.

"You know, Monsieur Carvajan, that I am not a man to utter an opinion or give advice lightly," the attorney was saying: "well, then, do not be too harsh with Monsieur de Clairefont—make things a little easy for him."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the banker.

"Do not be continually goading him on as you have been doing for the last year, sir. Let him breathe; in short, give him time."

"But can I do so? It is not I who have lent the money. I am but the middleman, and if I show the marquis consideration, perhaps, in the meantime, the security might depreciate in value, and in the end I might lose—"

"Oh, you cannot fear that!"

"One must always fear it."

"But who knows if Monsieur de Clairefont may not acquit himself of part of his debt, if he has a little respite



granted him?"

At these words, Carvajan, who, since the commencement of the conversation, had been cold and surly, at once became all smiles and coaxes. He took Malézeau by the arm, leaned familiarly upon him, and with a look that was almost a caress, so soft was it:

"Is there anything new?" he asked. "Ah, tell me all about it? Has the Baron de Croix-Mesnil made up his mind to marry? Is the water going to return to the mill?"

Already the attorney was regretting having aroused Carvajan's curiosity. He felt he had gone too far, and tried to beat a retreat, but the banker was not a man to easily give way.

"Come, Malézeau, you ought to be sincere. Has the marquis told you all about his latest invention? Has he ever shown you his famous furnace?"

"How do you know—"

"Isn't it my business to know everything?" broke in Carvajan, impatiently. "For the last six weeks I have had nothing but all sorts of tales about this furnace dinned into my ears. They say that it is really wonderful; that by means of a new system of draughts and gratings the marquis' furnace will be able to burn even wet shavings, and to throw out a tremendous heat. Is it true?"

The attorney made no reply.

"Well, why don't you speak out? Silence is as good an avowal as words. Have you seen the apparatus? Is it complete? An engineer, whose opinion I have asked, pretends that it would be of immense importance in certain industries."

Carvajan's excitement was so great that Malézeau hoped to turn the situation to his client's advantage. Perhaps, if he gave him to understand that the marquis' invention would result in considerable gain, he might be able to intimidate the banker and make him willing to come to some agreement.

"I have, indeed, seen the arrangement in question, and the marquis was good enough to light it for me—"

"Is the model of any importance? I mean, is it merely a plaything, or can any reasonable faith be put in the experiments made with it?"

"It is a well-constructed model which Monsieur de Clairefont has adapted to the stove in his laboratory. He uses it for his chemical experiments, and I am convinced that it will act as well in a large size as it does in miniature. I believe that in a very near future Mon-



sieur de Clairefont will be set afloat again. If you wish for my opinion about him, I think him a wonderful man, and that there will be, perhaps, more to gain by being on his side than by being against him."

"Oh, ho," said Carvajan, relieving his burdened chest by a low whistle. "Indeed! And so he is such a wonderful man as all that, this good marquis? Well, I am delighted to hear it for his own sake. But amongst his other discoveries, why does he not make the one that would give me more pleasure than all the rest put together—that of the money he owes me, and which I should be very glad to see back? You're a strange fellow, Malézeau, to come and calmly tell me such a parcel of nonsense as this. A wonderful man! Well, look here, I'll tell you something, and you know that I never make a threat I don't mean; if this wonderful man is not in a position to take up the bill which falls due at the end of this month, that is to say, three days after Saint Firmin, I'll have him and his fine family turned out of their noble chateau neck and crop, as true as my name's Carvajan. And if this furnace is such a marvel, Malézeau, it's I who will work it, and you can be quite sure I shall make more out of it than your old Utopian of a marquis."

Then, as the lawyer opened his mouth to make a supreme effort for his client:

"That's enough," said Carvajan haughtily. "You can tell him I'll give him till the end of the month and not a day more or less. And let him remember; for I do not forget."

And, raising his hand, he pointed with a bitter smile to a little white line, which stood out plainly on his brown cheek—the ineffaceable trace of the blow he had received from the whip thirty years before on Saint Firmin's night.

Then Pascal, in the disordered state of his thoughts, weighed the wrongs of his father against those of the marquis, and, to his anguish, found them equal. Yes, Monsieur de Clairefont had been guilty of grave offenses, and Carvajan's rancor was but just. Alas! that made the chasm between the two men but deeper still, too deep ever to be filled by mere human will. And, victims of this implacable enmity, the children, who were innocent and might have loved each other, found themselves condemned to hatred and strife.

All the noise going on around seemed horrible to him, and he managed to slip out unnoticed, and went into the deserted street. The air was soft and still, and the stars were shining in the clear, dark sky. He seated himself



on a stone bench near the fountain, which was flowing with a soft gurgling sound. All else was silent, and, alone amidst the sleeping town, unable to recollect anything but sadness in his past, looking forward to nothing but sorrow in the future, cursing the marquis, blushing for his father, determined to efface Antoinette's image from his heart, Pascal despairingly buried his face in his hands and wept bitterly.

## CHAPTER V.

The La Neuville fair was particularly brilliant that year. The cattle-market was crowded, and on an average, heifers brought twenty-five pistoles each. The streets were filled with loungers, the shops stood hospitably open, and the peasants sauntered along the sidewalks in their new cobalt-blue blouses, which the wind blew out like balloons at the back, staring idly about them, and followed by their wives and daughters wearing stiff white caps decorated with long gold pins.

Every moment a dog-cart or trap drove up, covered with dust, and bearing some farmer who sat with his cap on one side of his head and a cigar between his lips; and these fresh arrivals gave rise to endless greetings and exclamations of surprise and welcome.

"Why, here's Maitre Levasseur! How are you to-day?"

"Hi, Jean-Louis! Hi—i!"

"Ah, you knowing old bird! You did well to sell your apples last year. They won't bring much this."

"Shall we have some coffee? Lebourgeois, just look after my mare, will you? Give her half a peck of oats now and a drink of water in about half an hour's time."

The innkeeper, his wife and his stable boy were bustling about from bar to cellar and from cellar to barn. From the room on the ground-floor came the most terrible yells, which sounded as if half the occupants were murdering the other half; but it was merely friends coming to an arrangement about the price of some cattle. The air was filled with a strong smell of frying, and little clouds of blue smoke floated out of the kitchen, while dozens of rolls, baked to a golden-brown, which had just been taken out of the oven, were cooling in a basket near the window. From behind the tarpaulin walls of a shooting gallery, the detonations of the pistols sounded sharp and clear, mingling with the shrill, squeaky music of a roundabout, while on the box-seat of a phæton, behind which was seated a footman armed with a hunting-horn,



stood a dentist, brandishing a sabre, and explaining to the rustics with vulgar eloquence how, with the aid of this "instrument of warfare" he extracted the most refractory molars without pain or difficulty.

"A town dentist, to overawe you, would talk to you about the forceps, would offer you the punch, would advise you the forfex," he shouted in a hoarse voice. "All ignorance and imposition! The implement is nothing, the hand is all. With his improved instrument he might break the tooth or fracture your jaw, whereas, gentlemen, I will give you relief with anything, with a sabre, a nail, a pin if you like, before you can say, 'oh!' and all for fifty centimes."

A burning sun darted its fiery rays upon the town. The ground was so hot that it scorched the feet; not a breath of wind came to carry off the strong smell of the animals in their pens, and from the market-place to the town-gates circulated a noisy crowd, which was divided between business and pleasure. Before the mayoralty was grouped the members of the fire brigade in their life-saving dress, and in the large hall, decorated for the occasion with tri-colored flags, the sub-prefect was distributing the prizes gained at a congress of apple-growers.

Carvaján read an address, which was received with much applause, and the ceremony wound up with a noisy flourish of trumpets. Then a brief command was heard, the firemen fell into line, and the bugles rang out over the fields as the authorities passed out.

Gradually the procession melted away. The florid-complexioned, well-to-do farmers lingered to wait for a friend, and formed themselves into little groups in the market-place. At the corner of the Rue du Marché, the sub-prefect turned to speak to Carvaján, who was then walking beside him:

"Shall you be at the fete this evening, mayor?"

"Certainly, sir. To begin with, it is my duty to be present, and, in addition, it has always been the custom at La Neuville to spend an hour at the ball."

"Oh, well, then, I shall come," said the sub-prefect, "since you think it would be as well."

"You will do more to help your elections in an hour spent at the ball, where you will meet all the large farmers, than you would in a week's canvassing. And be attentive to the firemen, sir—they have a great deal of influence. You can never tell what you may not get with the help of the fire brigade."



"I see you have thoroughly studied the question," said the high official, laughing. "But one is always the gainer when in your society."

Carvajan's face changed. To him the phrase sounded like a sarcasm. But he looked at the sub-prefect, saw that he was condescendingly good-humored as usual, and reproached himself for his suspicion. "What can I be dreaming of?" he thought. "Whence should he obtain the audacity to attack me? Does he not know that if I chose, I could soon shatter all his plans?"

"Gentlemen, we shall meet again this evening at the corporation banquet."

Then he went down the little street to his home. It was mid-day, and at the church he met the people coming out from high mass. The women and girls came out chatting together, and filling the air with a buzzing like that of a hive. They were all dressed in their best, and carried their mass-books decently in their hands; and as they passed the mayor, they one and all lowered their voices to a whisper; for even these women, who yet had nothing to fear, felt the impression of terror which Carvajan had cast around him. The latter merely smiled. It was not displeasing to him to feel himself feared; for he regarded it as a proof of his power.

But when he had passed the fountain, and was about to raise the knocker, he paused. He had just caught sight of Pascal slowly approaching from the other end of the street, and everything about the young man betokened thought and despondency. Since he had returned to La Neuville his bronzed complexion had grown pale, and his cheeks had fallen in. Nothing of this change had escaped Carvajan's eye, and as he watched his son walking down the street, with weary, lagging steps, he asked himself if it could indeed be the same brisk, vigorous man he had greeted at the station a few days before.

They met at the door, and Pascal could not repress a start on looking up and seeing his father.

"Have you just come from the fair?" asked Carvajan, attentively observing his son.

"Yes, father," answered Pascal, as though aroused from a dream.

"Are you hungry?"

"I am, indeed." And they went into the dining-room.

"He has not even noticed that there is a fair at La Neuville to-day," thought Carvajan. "He has been hanging about Clairefont again—that chalky dust on his boots comes from the Great Marl-Pit. He evidently mis-



trusts me. Whenever I ask him a question he never answers but with a lie. He even fears to look at me; he is afraid that I should read his thoughts in his eyes."

Pascal, in fact, was seated on the other side of the table, his eyes bent on his plate, eating with an absent-minded, abstracted air. Determined as he was to leave the country, he had been unable to resist the desire to once more climb the Clairefont hill; and, leaving the house as soon as he had seen his father set out for the mayoralty, had reached the plateau by the path which led past the Great Marl-Pit.

He did not intend as before to lie in ambush near the park; for he was afraid of being seen, and a wave of blood rushed to his brain at the thought of finding himself face to face a second time with Antoinette.

He thought that she would be sure to go to mass, and by nine o'clock he was in the little church. He seated himself on a wooden bench in a dark corner, where it was nearly impossible for anyone to recognize him, and there he patiently waited, looking at the ornaments on the altar, the pictures on the walls, the stained glass windows, and finding in each object a trace of the devout generosity of the chatelains of Clairefont.

On a white marble medallion near one of the confessional boxes, Pascal saw these words inscribed in golden letters: "The Lord has preserved to me my beloved daughter. May His holy name be praised!" And beneath were the name and date: "Honoré de Clairefont, 1872." It was a pious tribute of gratitude which had been placed there by the marquis on Antoinette's recovery from a dangerous illness.

Then Pascal had an hallucinatory vision in the solemn mysterious darkness of the church. It seemed to him that he was borne away towards the chateau by a force which annihilated all volition on his part. He entered the old mansion, went to the young girl's chamber, and there, stretched on her bed, pale and hollow-cheeked, he saw her at the point of death. He recognized her at once, although she looked but a pretty child. Beside the sick-bed sat an old man whom Pascal did not know, but whom he guessed to be the marquis. He was holding his daughter's thin, white hand, while large tears stood in his eyes, and his lips moved as though in prayer; and Pascal knew that he was offering up a heartfelt petition to God to save his child.

Then, as if by an immediate manifestation of the Divine Will, the color came into Antoinette's cheeks, and



her eyes shone clear and bright. There was a sudden transformation in her. It was no longer a sick child upon whom the young man was gazing, but the beautiful girl he had met in the shady lane, the girl he at once dreaded and worshiped, and for whom he would have unhesitatingly laid down his life.

Pascal made an effort to dispel this vision and to regain his self-possession. He sought something real on which to fix his eyes, and his glance fell again on the white marble tablet; again he repeated the inscription to himself, as if he were thanking God for having saved Antoinette. Had she not been kept from death that he might see and love her? But if he were destined to love her, why then should she hate him? He rose and slowly moved towards the rows of chairs which stood facing the altar. A fall-stool in black wood, with a cushion of blue velvet, standing in the middle of the first row, attracted his attention, and he approached it, feeling sure that it was there that Antoinette offered up her prayers. He bent his knee where she knelt, and seeing that the ledge of the fall-stool formed a box, he opened it and saw a mass-book lying inside beside a collecting bag. He took the book in his trembling hand. It was small, with silver clasps, and covered in white morocco. On the fly-leaf there was a date—that of Antoinette's first communion, the rest was white and spotless as her soul. Pascal could not resist the desire of looking through this book, hoping to find in it some trace of the young girl's inner thoughts, but there were only sacred pictures between the pages. One of Saint Antoinette bore the words: "To my dear sister, from Robert de Clairefont." Pascal's heart was filled with a deep tenderness as he saw the simple, loving souvenirs, and he reproached himself for his curiosity; for it seemed to him that he had been guilty of a profanity. He closed the book again, and leaning his forehead on this mute confidante of hope and despair, he prayed.

Gradually his heart regained its calmness. He left more a master of himself, more sure of doing what was right. He rose, and catching sight of the bag, in which no doubt Mademoiselle de Clairefont was going to receive the offerings of the charitable that very day, he slipped his alms into it, then closed the box, and regained his place in the dark corner of the church.

The bell began to ring. The sacristan came into the choir to light the candles, and the gloomy nave was starred with trembling flames. Heavy footsteps dragged over the flag-stones, the grating of the chairs as they were



moved echoed through the sonorous emptiness of the arched building, and one after another the congregation took their places. Just as the priest was coming out of the sacristy, a light foot-fall made Pascal start. He turned eagerly towards the porch, and there he saw Antoinette entering the church, followed by Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice, and accompanied by a tall, military-looking young man, in whom Pascal's agitation made him recognize Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil. A mist came before his eyes, the stained glass windows seemed to be gleaming and flaming, there was a ringing in his ears, and the church seemed to shake on its foundations. Then he made a violent effort, and again he saw and heard.

The priest was at the altar, and the murmur of his chant sounded distinctly amidst the silence. The two women and their companion were lost in the crowd. Pascal rose, and, leaning against a pillar, looked round for Antoinette. He saw her on the other side of the church, her head bent and absorbed in prayer as she knelt between her aunt and her betrothed. And such was the ending of his fondly cherished dream—the sight of Mademoiselle de Clairefont beside the man who was destined to be her husband. All the schemes, all the hopes, all the fears to which he had so passionately devoted himself had troubled no one but himself. She, who in his thoughts had formed their center, had not the faintest knowledge of them. Calm and cold as before she went on her way, unconscious of the tempest she had raised.

He bitterly asked himself what he was doing in this church, and, with the certainty of the futility of his illusions, he regained all his energy. He rose, went out without once looking round, and, following the road by which he had come, returned to the town. And that was the happy walk from which he was returning, when he met his father.

Seated opposite one another, the two men continued to eat their lunch in silence. Outside, the farmers, who continued to arrive in ever-increasing numbers, walked past the house in little groups. The sounds of pistols fired in the distance, the greeting shouts, the jokes and songs were all mingled in a joyous tumult.

At Clairefont and in the little house in the Rue du Marché alone, did thought and melancholy reign supreme. Victor and vanquished alike were anxious; the marquis, because Antoinette's *fiancé* had arrived the evening before to pass a few days at the chateau; Carvajan, because he saw before him the son, whom he had dreamed



of attaching to himself by the bonds of tranquil happiness, gloomy and uneasy.

Honoré, suddenly aroused from his egoistic abstraction, had been compelled to return to the bitter realities of life. The presence of Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil had again brought to his memory the difficulties of his financial position and the inexplicable hesitation Antoinette displayed in putting off her marriage month after month.

The mayor of La Neuville was asking himself with wondering anxiety if, at the very moment of his triumph, some obstacle was to be placed in his path against which all the energy of his will would be of no effect. Pascal's dejection caused him a feeling of dull uneasiness which he was not the man to bear for very long, and he determined to question his son boldly and to have a final and decisive explanation.

Early that morning the occupants of Clairefont had been awakened by the traditional firing which announced the commencement of the fete. At the sound, a window in the front of the house was thrown open, and Antoinette, with a white wrapper thrown round her, leaned out, looking serious and thoughtful. Her pale face, her red eyes testified to the weariness and desponding thoughts of a sleepless night, and evidently the dawn had not dispelled these shadows; for the young girl stood motionless at the window, utterly indifferent to the beauty of the sweet summer morning. Her pretty forehead had an anxious fold in it, and about her eyes, fixed absently on space, there was the weary, languid look of recently shed tears. It was only when her bed-room door was opened that she roused herself, and looking round, she saw her Aunt Isabelle, and her sad face was lighted by a smile.

Robed in a large-patterned chintz dressing gown, her gray hair in wild disorder and her face as red as a peony, in spite of a liberal application of rice powder, the old maid came in with an air of deep mystery. She bestowed two hearty kisses on her niece; then, leaning her back against the mantel-piece in a thoroughly masculine attitude, she said:

"I hear'd you open your window, so I thought I would come to you. I have passed a frightful night—nothing but nightmare the whole time. I don't know whether you believe in dreams? I do. My mother used to tell what they meant in a wonderful way, and her prophecies always came true. Well, last night I dreamt of a red cock—that's always a sign of misfortune or death. I thought I saw a tremendous red cock with a face just



like that horrible Carvajan's, and he was crowing and flapping his wings. I woke up with a start, and all in a perspiration. I haven't got over it yet. You know the position in which we are placed. Yesterday evening a notice came that we were to pay a hundred and sixty thousand francs, some odd centimes. Of course I hid the paper away, and I haven't dared mention it to your father. But, nevertheless, we must see what is to be done; for things won't stay as they are. We are at our last penny, and I don't know how we are going to take up this bill. A hundred and sixty thousand francs are not to be picked up in the road, and I haven't a *sou*. Saint-Maurice is all I have left. There's a house there that is just habitable, and the estate brings in two thousand five hundred francs a year. It'll be a roof to cover us in the days of poverty that we shall see but too soon, and enough bread to keep us from starving, and wild horses shall not make me give it up, for it is our last resource now that your father has so shamefully squandered and lost all."

With a gesture of entreaty, Antoinette seated herself beside her aunt, and turned towards her, her sweet face blanched with worry.

"Auntie, please don't blame my father," she said. "He has done everything for the best. He certainly has pursued shadows and given way too much to false hopes, but he had but one end in view—to enrich us and increase our comfort. You know that he does not care a bit about himself, and the little Chateau de Saint-Maurice will seem a palace to him, if he has us all there with him."

"Oh, I know he has a heart of gold, but unfortunately that will not pay his debts, and the creditors who are harassing us won't give us any peace. Malézeau has seen Carvajan, and he says he was harder and more bitter even than usual, so we must not be surprised at anything that may happen. My dear, it's enough to drive one mad. If between now and the end of the week, we do not find some means of gaining time, we shall have to get out of here. We shall see the bailiffs in the drawing rooms of Clairefont, and we shall be turned out of our ancestral home. What will Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil think of that?"

"I don't worry myself about him, auntie," answered Antoinette with a smile. "I know him, and he would be just as willing to marry me if I were poor, as if I were rich. And if I loved him—"

"Don't you love him?" cried Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice in horrified tones. "What! After he has been



courting you for nearly two years !”

“I think him charming, auntie,” replied the young girl with gentle melancholy, “but he is not the man one ought to marry, if the love of the man to whom one is bound is all the happiness one has to expect. He is very gentlemanly and rather cold, capable of every delicacy of feeling and quick to respond to every noble sentiment; but he will never feel the grand impulses or the ardent devotion of the man whose passion fills his soul. You know that—you told me so yourself one day. Shall I consent to become his wife to see him risk being ruined with us, with the certainty that he has neither sufficient energy nor talent to overcome the difficulties with which we are surrounded? No, aunt, it would be ungenerous; it would be mean, and I will not do it.”

“Well, the poor boy certainly would get the worst of it, if he had to ‘portend’ with Carvajan. Ah, if only I had the power to endow him with genius and talent, as they do in the fairy tales! I mean a real, serious, practical genius—not like your father’s. How delighted I should be to see him attack that ‘schismatic’ old mayor! Ah! to pay back the scoundrel all the harm he has done us; to fight him with his own weapons, to triumph over him, and to laugh at him till we were tired! Well, there, I don’t know what I wouldn’t give for that!”

Aunt Isabelle nodded her head vigorously two or three times, took a few strides; then seating herself opposite her niece, continued:

“Why is not your brother as sharp-witted as he is muscular! He’d have pitched into the mayor and given him what for? But he’s a perfect baby where business is concerned, like your father and myself: you have all the brains of the family, my dear. Strange times to live in when a Carvajan can worry and torment a Clairefont, and the latter has no one to look to for help and succor but himself! In bygone times, he would have gone to the king, and the affair would have been put right before you could look round, but now it’s nothing of the kind. If the scale goes down at all, it is in favor of these wretches, and every advantage is given to them. The greater rogues they are, the more favor can they count upon. And so you see, my dear child, that we have no one on our side, and we must resign ourselves to our fate.”

“That is the easiest part of it all, auntie. Our life will not be changed in the least. How have we been living for the last few years? In the most miserable way. Poverty is a hundred times harder to bear in a mansion intended to



be the scene of luxury, than in a modest little house. I was born at Clairefont; it is here I have grown up and learned to suffer, and I am bound to the place by a thousand associations; but I would break every tie without a regret if we could find peace and safety elsewhere. Only let my father be free and at ease; only let his old age be shielded from care and anxiety; only let us emerge from our present difficulties with the honor of our name intact, and I promise you I will not shed one tear for the brilliant past, and that I shall only be too thankful for the humble, happy present."

"And you will remain unmarried?"

"Of course I shall remain unmarried, auntie, like you. We two shall finish by being the same age, and we shall have little hobbies, we shall play cards, we shall wear very young-looking caps trimmed with ribbons, we shall make our own jam, and papa will tell us all about his latest inventions (which he will have no means to put into practice), and we shall give them our sincere admiration, since they will no longer cost anything. Then, as we shall always have enough at Saint-Maurice to feed a horse on, when it is fine and we have been very good, we shall drive in the woods with Robert. Come, auntie, look pleased! There are still good times in store for us. With the help of a little philosophy one can become accustomed to anything, and when one is with loved ones, what can there be to complain of?"

The old maid started to her feet, stretched out her long arms, and, catching her niece round the waist, pressed her closely to her bony chest.

"You dear, good child!" she exclaimed tenderly. "Wherever you are, there will be happiness. You are the sunshine of the house, and I don't know what would become of us without you. You're right—don't you marry your dragoon. If you stay with us, you will be poor, but you will have your liberty—with him you would have a little more money, but you couldn't call your soul your own. I know I am abominably selfish, and that I think only of myself when I encourage you in your ideas of independence. But let him blame me who likes! I have you as my living excuse."

"Don't reproach yourself, auntie," said Antoinette, turning her head a little aside, "you have not influenced my decision. I made up my mind a long time ago, and I am only waiting for an opportunity to tell Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil. He is a gentleman, and as such he will understand my reasons for breaking off the engagement,



and will still remain our friend. As for papa, it will be best to say nothing at all to him about it, and especially not to-day. Let us get the fete over, and then if there is any need, we will have a family council to-morrow."

"Let us hope that no disagreeable incident will arise to aggravate the situation," said Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice. "I have a presentiment of evil, and I am rarely mistaken."

Mademoiselle de Clairefont slowly shook her head.

"We will pray to God to spare us any increase of sorrow," she replied. "He cannot mean us to be totally cast down, but if such is His will—"

"Then I hope it will be I that he will visit with His wrath, and that you, my dear children, may be spared!" exclaimed the old maid, with a passion of devotedness which sent the blood to her face in crimson waves. "There goes the first bell, and I haven't even done my hair," said Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice. "I must run. Good-bye for the present." And reaching the door in two strides, she disappeared like a whirlwind.

Aunt Isabelle was never long "getting herself up," as she said, and it was not five minutes' walk from the chateau to the church; so the priest had not finished pronouncing the benediction before Mademoiselle de Clairefont, accompanied by her aunt and Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil, had reached her seat and commenced to pray.

Pascal's deep sigh when he saw Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil did not reach Antoinette's ears, and the sound of the footsteps of the man who adored her, as he left the church, aroused no echo in her heart. She remained absorbed in her holy meditations until her aunt gave her a gentle nudge, saying: "Get ready for the collection;" and then she closed her book, opened the box of her fall-stool, and took out the velvet bag with the faded embroidered representation of the Clairefont arms.

The beadle, his silver-headed cane in his hand, came up to her with a profound bow, and Antoinette left her seat and went towards the choir. As she walked, she fancied she heard a slight metallic chink within the bag, and, loosening the silken cords, she saw with an amazement which sent the blood rushing to her cheeks, five pieces of gold shining on the black leather lining.

She reached the altar, bent low before it, then commenced the collection, feeling very troubled in her mind; and the half-pennies and pence fell into the bag, hiding from sight the mysterious louis as she went from seat to seat murmuring mechanically: "For the poor, please."



"Who has come to the church this morning and so generously left this anonymous gift?" she thought as she moved down the church. She looked eagerly around, glancing into all the dark corners, but only the familiar faces of the peasants met her gaze; for Pascal was already far away.

From that time to the end of the mass, Antoinette paid little attention to the service. Her book lay idle in her hands, as she forgot to read her prayers, and she sat with her eyes fixed on a large glass window, on which was depicted the struggle between Jacob and the angel, and which had been given to the church by her great grandfather. The son of Isaac was shown striving to hold his celestial adversary within his powerful arms, and beneath the painter had traced these words in Gothic characters: "Thus does man, bound to earth, strive to conquer heaven."

To Mademoiselle de Clairefont, who had never examined the window so attentively before, there seemed a strong likeness between the features of Jacob and those of someone who was not altogether a total stranger to her. She knew this strong-looking face with the brown beard and the piercing eyes, but she could not remember where or when she had seen it. It was in vain she racked her brain—memory would not come to her aid. The priest had left the altar and the congregation were crowding out of the church, and yet she sat still lost in thought.

"Come, dear, we must go," said Aunt Isabelle. "Baron, will you wait for us at the door? We have to give in our accounts to the priest."

Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil bowed, and went towards the porch, while the two others turned towards the sacristy. They found the good-hearted, simple-minded priest, who had christened Antoinette and prepared her for her first communion, removing his sacerdotal garments. But as soon as he saw them, he tore himself from the hands of his sister, who was unfastening his surplice, and hastily advanced to meet them.

"Pray do not let us disturb you, my dear Abbé," exclaimed Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice. "We have only a moment to stay. Antoinette has come to give you the proceeds of the collection and then we must run off."

Mademoiselle Bihorel, the priest's sister, had already opened the velvet bag, and was turning the contents upon the table. The gold, silver and copper rolled out together, and she uttered an exclamation of surprise:

"Oh, brother, look!"

The priest smiled, and taking the young girl's hands:



"This is your lavish gift—I know your generous disposition. But it is too much, my child, and I ought to scold rather than thank you."

"I do not deserve any thanks, your reverence," she said hastily. "This money is not from me. I found it in the bag before I commenced the collection."

At this Aunt Isabelle's amazement became nothing short of stupefaction. For a moment she was dumb; then heaving a sigh which was like the neighing of a horse, she exclaimed:

"Well, this is rather too much of a good thing! How on earth could it have got there? I sent Bernard with the bag to put in your fall-stool myself, yesterday evening. Has anyone dared to go rummaging—"

"At any rate, auntie, whoever it was can't have done so with any thievish intentions," interrupted her niece playfully, "since instead of taking anything he has left me money for the poor. Besides, perhaps, there was no need for anyone to rummage, as you say. Bernard may have simply placed the bag on, instead of inside, the fall-stool. In any case, what is there so important about the affair for you to make so much fuss about it?"

Aunt Isabelle was afraid she had pained her, and, wishing to soothe her, said jokingly:

"You'll find it was the baron who has risen at daybreak in order to come here on the quiet and prepare you a little surprise."

"Aunt, you know very well that that could not be. To begin with, Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil is not an early riser, and secondly, he did not know it was I who was to make the collection."

"I don't know anyone round here to whom we can give the credit of so much generosity," said Mademoiselle Bihorel, meditatively.

"And no stranger has visited the church, to my knowledge," added the priest. He paused abruptly. "Unless it was the young man I saw this morning as I walked round the church pronouncing the benediction."

"What young man?" asked Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice, her forehead gathering into a frown.

"A dark, bearded young man, who was sitting near the front, in a dark corner to the right of the door."

As if evoked by magic, Pascal's face appeared before Antoinette's eyes. She knew now who it was who resembled the son of the patriarch wrestling with the angel. Did he, as it said beneath the picture, wish to attain heaven? And what would heaven be to a Carvajan, if not a Claire-



font's love? There could not be the slightest doubt but that it was he who had gone to her fall-stool, opened it, and left there the proof of his impertinent curiosity.

She thought him strangely bold, and her anger rose at his audacity. What did he want? For what did he hope? Did he think to keep himself present to her mind, merely because he had once met her by chance? Did he pretend to her gratitude by his offensive generosity?

To these questions the gentler voice of her reason replied: "Of what have you to complain? He has placed his gift in your hands and yet hidden himself. He might have remained in the church, to wait till you came to him, and have given you his alms openly, if he had chosen. But he was afraid of displeasing you; he dared not meet your eyes. He has been timid and respectful, and are you going to reproach him for it?"

"Well, now you have delivered up your accounts, let us hurry off, my child," said Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice. "We have kept that poor baron cooling his heels at the door a tremendous time; let us go and relieve him. Good-bye, my dear Abbé; good-bye, little one."

The "little one," who had turned her back sometime since on her fiftieth year, made a deep curtsey, and accompanied the two ladies from the chateau to the door of the sacristy. Hardly were the aunt and niece alone in the church before Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice began, while she watched Antoinette with eyes brimming with curiosity.

"Well, I suppose you recognized your donor in the portrait the priest drew of him? It was certainly the heir of the house of Carvajan himself."

"Oh, auntie!" murmured the young girl, wearily.

"Oh, well! What is it? The old rogue's son, stung by remorse perhaps, restores a little of the money his father has stolen, and makes use of your hand to make a restitution so agreeable to both God and man. Very moral and extremely gallant! You will find that we have unawares an ally in that monster's stronghold."

"Pray do not joke on such a subject, aunt," said Mademoiselle de Clairefont in an agitated voice.

"What's the matter? I don't understand your emotion," said the old maid in surprise.

"The matter is that all this humiliates and wounds me—that I cannot admit the idea of a stranger thus forcing himself into my life. I do not know this man, he is already odious to me, and I wish to know nothing of him, unless it is that he is his father's son and that consequently I ought, if not to despise him, at least to hate him.



Besides, how do you know that he did not put the money there out of bravado? Does it not look like a cruel jest? He knows that we are so impoverished that we can no longer afford to bestow our alms as in the past, and does he not intend to make us understand that, without the aid of a Carvajan, we should be obliged to leave empty the outstretched hands of the unfortunate."

"Goodness, how you excite yourself! And really it isn't worth while. Anyway, he's managed to get himself thought about and talked about enough for a mere hundred francs; if that is what he reckoned on doing, he isn't so very stupid after all. How his ears must burn! But let me say one word more before we dismiss the subject. I do not think he is so black as you paint him. In the past, he used to quarrel dreadfully with his father, and though it's true he has returned home, is that a proof that he holds the same opinions as that old rascal? For my part, my dream would be to see them eat each other up, Carvajan against Carvajan! When Greek meets Greek—'thugs' of war—you know."

"But you will not enjoy such a spectacle, aunt," answered Antoinette, with contemptuous bitterness. "When the time comes, you may be sure they will unite to crush us. But whether that is so or not, do not let us ever speak again of what has taken place."

They left the church, and found Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil very intent on deciphering an epitaph on the stone which served as a doorstep, and from which he turned with a smile when he saw them. He was a handsome man of about thirty, with dark eyes and fair moustache, a particularly well-bred manner, and a remarkably pleasant nature. He had given proofs of great valor during the war when he was under the command of General de Charette, and he was usually spoken of as being one of those quiet men who expose themselves to the greatest dangers without a word to draw anyone's attention, and who will give the deadliest orders in the most tranquil, placid voice.

"I am summoning all my classic memories to my aid to arrive at an understanding of this Latin inscription," he said, as the two ladies approached. "Unless I am mistaken, it refers to a certain Abbé de Clairefont who was buried here owing to his wish that his mortal remains should be trodden under foot by the feet of the faithful as they entered the place of worship. At least that is what I take it to mean,—*calcabunt fidelium pedes*."

"That is perfectly right," answered Mademoiselle de



Saint-Maurice. "It is the grave of Foulque de Clairefont, Prior of Jumiège. If you care to hear it, the marquis will tell you his history. He began as a musketeer, and led a very bad life; then he became a model of piety and finished by being a saint. He is the religious pride of the house, and you will see his portrait in the oratory."

"Here are papa and Robert coming to meet us," broke in Antoinette at this point.

The marquis, leaning on his son's arm, was advancing slowly along the avenue of lime-trees which stretched from the village to the chateau gates. Robert was talking gayly to his father, and with his left hand he had hold of Antoinette's deer-hound, which he was leading by a chain. When he caught sight of his sister, he loosed the dog, which darted off like an arrow, leaped about the young girl with short, sharp barks of delight.

"Why didn't you let the poor thing run as he liked?" cried Mademoiselle de Clairefont, who had distanced her companions, as soon as she was within speaking distance.

"Because he had already started off once to join you at church. Now as I have never heard of mass being said for dogs—"

"Ah, of course; when Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil is here, Fox will not leave me," said Antoinette with a smile.

"He is jealous, *parbleu*," said Robert, laughing.

"There is no reason for him to be," replied the baron, gently. "Of the two rivals, the man certainly does not receive the better treatment from mademoiselle."

"Come, Croix-Mesnil, it will all come right in the end," said the marquis. "Let us go in now, and after lunch I will show you my new furnace. You'll see, it's a marvel! When one has invented anything so simple and yet destined to have such wonderful results, one need not despair. We shall soon have the Great Marl-Pit at work again, and this time with such improvements in the kilns that it will be certain fortune. You'll see—you'll see."

Antoinette and her aunt exchanged a rapid look. The girl's heart felt very heavy as she heard the inventor speak so confidently of riches and work when he was on the eve of utter ruin.

"We shall have to go to the fete this evening, my children," resumed Monsieur de Clairefont. "We will wait until the heat of the day is over, and after dinner we will quietly walk down to the town for an hour or so."

A cloud came over Antoinette's face.

"Do you think our absence would be misinterpreted if we stayed away, papa?" she said, diffidently. "We



really take no interest in these fairs. Why should we go?"

"To conform to custom. We, of all people, have no right to disregard tradition."

"No doubt; but it will be very fatiguing for you amongst the crowd, the noise and dust," returned Antoinette, who was trembling with the thought that a malicious word, a thoughtless allusion might roughly and suddenly reveal the truth to the marquis.

"Oh, I, my daughter; I am not at all anxious to go beyond the gates of Clairefont, and the presence of you young people at the ball will be quite sufficient."

"Oh, well then, we'll go and represent you," said the young girl, eagerly; "and thus you will not be tired, and no one will be able to find any fault."

"There's a happy conclusion to arrive at, Miss Wisdom, and I am delighted to have given you such thorough satisfaction," said her father, smiling. "I shall take advantage of the opportunity to commence a chemical analysis which I have for some time put off in the fear of drawing reproaches upon my head."

"All I can say is that the last time you did anything of the kind, you blackened all the frames in the picture gallery, and made my clothes smell horrid for a fortnight afterwards," said Aunt Isabelle, tartly.

"That's true," confessed the *savant*, humbly. "In my preoccupation, I forgot to open the window, and I did spoil some of the gilding. But I'll be more careful this time."

The tumult of the fair, interrupted for an hour by the mid-day meal, had ceased for a short time. A scorching sun blazed down upon town and fields alike, and even the birds in the trees of the promenade were silent from very drowsiness. Still, half way up the Clairefont hill, the sound of shouts and noisy laughter could be heard ever and again. These originated in Pourtois' large dining-room where every year Tondeur gave a lunch to his fellow-carpenters. It was customary to sing songs during the dessert which lasted far into the afternoon, and each one cheerfully "doing his best," as the wood-merchant said, the uproar of the choruses which were taken up by everyone present amidst the smoke of pipes and the fumes of alcoholic liquors, swelled now and then into a tremendous crescendo, which was followed for some moments by a deep silence, the voice of the soloist being lost in the distance.

Seated near a window in the small drawing-room of the



chateau, busy at some embroidery, Antoinette listened absently to these distant vociferations, as she watched beside her father, who was taking his siesta stretched upon a sofa. Robert and Croix-Mesnil were walking up and down the terrace together, while Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice, armed with some long scissors, was clearing away the faded flowers from the vases. Suddenly the young count paused in his walk, and, looking his companion full in the face, said :

“If I were in your place, my dear fellow, I should speak to her straight out; there’s nothing worse than uncertain and false positions. It all depends on her. You know how much we all like you, and that if it had only needed our consent you would have been Antoinette’s husband long ago. But the young lady is perfectly free, and it’s no easy job to make her do the opposite of what she has decided. She is as good as an angel, but as obstinate as the devil, though no one would think it to look at her.”

They were passing the window, near which the young girl was working, and they paused to look at her. Her head was bowed, and, unconscious of any observation, she was not attempting to conceal the deep melancholy that she felt. A sad smile was on her lips, and it was with difficulty that she restrained the tears from flowing from between her fluttering eyelids. Her dog, lying at her feet, raised his intelligent eyes to her as if he understood the emotion which had overpowered her, and touched her hand with his long nose. She looked at the deer-hound, wound her arms around his neck; then, unable to contain herself any longer, burst into tears.

“Good heavens, she is crying!” said the baron excitedly. “Look at her, Robert. What does it mean? What is going on? I must question her, even though I risk displeasing her.”

He went up to the window to which his head hardly reached, and was just about to speak when Antoinette put her finger to her lips as a sign to him to be silent. He pointed to the park with a gesture of entreaty to her to come. She silently rose, and bestowing a glance upon her father, who was still sleeping and smiling at some happy dream, she left the room lightly as a sylph, and went out of doors. The baron offered her his arm, and they slowly walked down towards the park. A stone bench, still warm from the burning mid-day heat, stood beside the path, and the two turned and sat down on it.

Antoinette saw that she could no longer put off answering the questions her *fiancé* had so considerably refrained



from pressing for so long. She raised her wet eyes to his face, and seeing how troubled and anxious he looked, impulsively slipped her hand in his. He pressed it gently within his own, and looking tenderly at her, asked

“Do you give it to me to keep?”

She made no answer save a sad shake of the head.

“Antoinette, dear,” he resumed, “I have noticed a great change in your manner towards me for some time past. You greet me with constraint, you treat me coldly, and, though I have said nothing, it has deeply pained me. I am not demonstrative—you will never hear me, like some men whom I envy, pour out my feelings in fiery protestations; and I know that it is to my disadvantage that I cannot do so, that it makes me seem cold, and that I may be put down as being indifferent. But because my feelings are hidden, they are not the less deep; and you may always be sure that I am a man whose heart can never change. When I obtained from Monsieur de Clairefont and from yourself the hope that I might one day become your husband, it made me exceedingly happy; I loved you; I knew how good and tender you were; for I had seen your behavior to your father, and I also knew that the man who called you his would be worthy the envy of all. And yet, when you put off the realization of our plans, whatever was the grief I felt, I submitted to your will. I thought then that I could find no better way of proving my love for you than by my patience and fidelity. But now I ask myself if I was not at fault in my reasoning. Perhaps the outburst of a violent despair, the hot reproaches of a wounded heart would have moved you more, and have induced you to yield. I did not think I ought to belie my nature, so I suffered in silence at the risk of being thought but very little in love; and now to my bitter regret I cannot help thinking that I have gradually allowed the kindly feelings you had for me to fade away and die.”

“Do not think that,” interposed Mademoiselle de Clairefont. “Do not think me guilty of forgetfulness any more than I do you of coldness. It is the force of fatal, lamentable circumstances alone which has done all. In one day, my position was so utterly changed that it was no longer right for me to consent to marry you. Had I told you the truth, you would have been compelled either to accept the situation as it was, or to withdraw your word under conditions you might have found humiliating; and, out of consideration for you, I refused my consent. We have both played the same *role*, we have



both displayed a similar sacrifice of self, a corresponding degree of honor, and we have both been but very ill rewarded; since I see that you suffer, and that yet I can do nothing to console you."

"What! nothing?" said the young man sadly. "But what is the misfortune which is so serious that neither you nor I can do anything to remedy it? Ah, the real, the only mischief is that you do not love me. If your heart were mine you would not have paid so much attention to your reason."

"I have a sincere affection for you, and one which will not change," replied Antoinette.

"Yes, the affection of a sister. But that is not what I want from you."

"It is an affection which prompted me to stretch out my hand to you with confidence and pleasure."

"But one which has not been the strongest feeling in your heart, and which has sacrificed me—"

"To an affection older and of longer standing, and which has more demands upon me—that I bear my father."

"Didn't you already love him enough without this?" exclaimed the young man jealously.

"The affection a child feels for his father ought to know no limits," returned the girl firmly. "But have you not noticed, not understood what is going on here, that you are so persistent? Have you not seen how for the last two years we have been sinking lower and lower towards utter ruin? Has the painful comedy which we have played for the last two months for my father's sake escaped your eyes? By sacrifices innumerable we have hitherto satisfied every demand, but now it is all over. We can lay claim no longer to any part of our possessions—we could be turned out of here to-morrow. In fact we are expecting that to happen; for the man who is harassing us will be inflexible. But of all this my father is yet in ignorance. It would have been of no use to show him the result of his faults since it was beyond his power to make reparation for them. He is simply an old baby whom we have spoiled, perhaps too much, but who would die if we were not there to make him live in an atmosphere of fictitious happiness. You see I am answerable for his moral well-being. Can I consent to let you share my bondage?"

"That is what I wished and what I still wish now. You are poor, you say? Well, then, I have money enough for both of us. I will love your father as you love him



yourself. He will not lose a daughter, he will gain another son to cherish and help him. With what I possess we will set his affairs straight, and then we shall have enough to restore your own fortune to you."

"Never!" cried Mademoiselle de Clairefont. "That is what I should dread above all things. You do not know the unconscious selfishness of an inventor. Convinced of the merit of his discovery he has no hesitation in sacrificing all to a chimerical future. My father has thrown gold into his crucibles, and what has he got in return? Nothing but ashes. And should we drag you down with ourselves? No, I should reproach myself as for a crime. We have the right to do ourselves as much injury as we like, but to permit a stranger to become the victim of our errors is a thing to which I will never give my consent."

"As you know, you hurt me a great deal more by repelling my offers of assistance. But if you do not think of me, at least think a little of yourself. What is to become of you?"

For a moment Antoinette sat thinking. Then, without any hesitation, she turned a face beaming with serenity to Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil's gaze, and answered quietly:

"I shall be an old maid."

He opened his lips to entreat her, but she stopped him.

"Please do not say another word. Be generous, and do not add to my pain by showing me yours. I shall always keep a tender recollection of you, but your duty now is to forget me. I give you back your word. Go to-morrow and tell your father all; I am sure he will approve my scruples and encourage you to do as I ask."

"And which it is impossible for me to promise to do. Do not demand more of me than I can reasonably perform. Can you really have thought that I should consent to go away and not see you again?"

"I have not thought so, and I have even thought that your friendship would make up to me for all I lose by refusing to become your wife."

"I shall be always ready to serve you, as you know, and I cannot thank you enough for having been so frank and true with me. But do not let either of us take a definite determination. Let us leave the future free. Who knows but what the situation may change and we may yet be able to return to the projects which were so dear to me? Do not say, 'Never;' say, 'For the present.' Leave me some hope. I shall cling to it, and it will help me to bear all the pain your decision causes me."



She rose without making any reply, and, taking the arm he offered, slowly returned to the terrace.

Evening was drawing on and the valley beneath was veiled in a thin mist. The fete was approaching its height, and the noisy braying of a brass band rose above the murmurs of the crowd and floated up the hill.

"How all those people are enjoying themselves," said Mademoiselle de Clairefont, pointing out to her companion the outskirts of La Neuville, black with men, women and children.

"Well, they look as though they are, at any rate."

"We must do the same; for no one must think that we are sad."

The marquis came to meet them with Aunt Isabelle.

"Well, my children," said the old man, "are there to be no more difficulties, and are you agreed?"

"Yes, papa," answered Antoinette, serenely. "It is all arranged. You need not worry."

She gave Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil a tender smile, and, pressing his hand between her own, tried to inspire him with some of her own courage and resignation.

## CHAPTER VI.

It was eight o'clock, and an excited, noisy throng was hastening into the ball-room which Pourtois had erected. For a space of about fifty yards long by fifty wide the grass had been covered with planks. An enormous tarpaulin roof was supported by beams, on which were fastened painted cardboard shields bearing the monogram "R. F." in the centre, and surrounded by flags. Five tin chandeliers covered with lamps and reflectors shed a strong light on the scene, and all around the vast tent were placed seats covered with red twill. At one end, on a narrow platform, sat the musicians, awaiting the signal from Pourtois to commence playing. At the other end, facing the entrance and separated from the rest of the room by a rail, was a dais reserved for the authorities, on which stood three velvet easy-chairs surrounded by smaller ones, beneath a plaster bust representing the Republic, which had been placed in a recess formed of green boughs. On the left side of the tent were doors communicating with the garden of the tavern, which was illuminated with Chinese lanterns, the heat from which was shrivelling up the branches and twigs of the arbors.

Every now and then a dispute would arise, and the



vociferations and yells sounded as if murder at least were going to be done. At such times, little Madame Pourtois would appear upon the scene, looking stiff and starched in her best dress. She had a formula which always brought the unruly to their senses, and it was this:

"If you want to kick up a row, go outside and do it—we want some room. Either you'll behave or you'll be turned out. We only have respectable people here."

These decided and pointed words invariably reduced the most furious to obedience, especially as behind Madame Pourtois loomed the muscular form of her cousin Anastase, the slater from La Neuville, who came to help his relations on special occasions, and who could carry a drunken man out of the inn as easily as pluck an apple from a tree.

Pourtois, squeezed into a tight black frock-coat, and shining with excitement and heat, trotted backwards and forwards from the tent entrance to the groups already settled on the seats, showing the ladies to their places, smiling at their daughters and dexterously edging the fathers towards the inn. His high, shrill voice could be heard above all the uproar, and in his excitement the fat man actually wiped his forehead with the napkin he was carrying in his hand from habit.

The men of most importance in the district, such as the rich farmers and the large millers, he placed at the foot of the official dais as they came in. Loud, hearty laughs of satisfaction pealed out at each arrival, the men shaking each other by the hand as if nothing short of a dislocated shoulder would be a sufficient demonstration of their friendly feelings, and the women putting on a mincing air with an affectation of the highest breeding. The girls kissed one another effusively, turning pale with vexation if they found their dresses put in the shade by the superior elegance of a rival's costume. They gathered together in a little group where they strove to outdo each other in gossip and ill-natured remarks about the people as they came in, and the most malicious slanders were uttered by these innocent-looking lips.

"Ah, how glad I am to see you, dear! Do just look at Mademoiselle Delarue; isn't she a sight this evening! And her mother looks as if she had just come out of an old rag-bag!"

"Oh, don't talk about her. They say that young Levasseur, who was to have married her, has got out of it. The Delarues are at very low water just now; they've even sold half their cattle."

"Ah, here's Véronique Auclair! Did you ever see



such feet? How can she be so silly as to wear white shoes when she has feet like those!"

"The Leglorieux have come. Do you see them—at the other end of the room, on the left-hand side? That great Félicie will crick her neck if she tosses her horse's head so much."

"You know that they talk about a match between her and Monsieur Carvajan's son?"

"Nonsense! She is not rich enough. Why, the mayor of La Neuville has hundreds of thousands—he'll want a daughter-in-law from Paris. Oh, here he is coming in with his son."

Pourtois hurried to meet his patron, pushing everybody out of his way and doing the honors of the ball with a courtier-like *empressement*. He wished to lead Carvajan to the daïs, but the banker, who looked gloomier than usual, put the huge inn-keeper aside, and taking Pascal, who was walking behind him, by the arm, persisted in mixing with the other guests.

"Presently, Pourtois, presently. It's all right, my friend; don't you trouble about me. I want to walk round with my son. There will be plenty of time for me to appear in my official capacity."

Carvajan's motive for this conduct was solely a desire to show Pascal the importance he now possessed. He wanted him to see how even the wealthiest bowed and cringed before him. In short, he longed to display himself to his son in all the terrible grandeur of his power.

"You must renew your acquaintance with the people you have not seen for ten years, my boy," he said. "It will not do for you to stand apart looking as if you were totally unaccustomed to civilization. I hope you will show a smiling face to all these old friends who can remember your mother and will talk to you of her."

A pang shot through Pascal's heart at the words, and the pale face of his dead mother came before his eyes. She—the poor woman banished to the back of the gloomy house, where she had languished and faded away like a flower left without sun or air—she had friends who still remembered her! What bitter derision, or, rather, what incredible audacity! Had Carvajan so utterly forgotten the past that he was able to speak of his martyred wife without fear of evoking dangerous thoughts in his son's mind? Friends, these men and women around him dressed in their Sunday best, pretentious, coarse, grotesque and offending all the delicacy of his cultured mind! What could he and they ever have in common?



As he moved up the room, his father presented them to him, complacently enumerating the possessions and qualities of each one, reckoning up their incomes and valuing their influence. Every hand was stretched toward the mayor, and if Pascal could read a certain constraint in the eyes of some, the apparent warmth with which his father was always greeted told clearly of the servility in which the tyrant of La Neuville kept all his subjects.

To the rich and important, Carvajan was especially abrupt, cold and haughty. He felt an intense pleasure in making the largest landed proprietors of the canton feel the weight of his heavy hand, and, in spite of himself, Pascal could not help admiring the pride of this *parvenu* who, risen from so low a sphere, now ruled all those who had formerly regarded him with contempt. They crowded round him, flattering and paying every deference to him.

"Dear Monsieur Carvajan, what a very nice young man your son is! Shall we not one day have the pleasure of seeing you both at our house? You know that there you will be as if you were in your own home."

The banker did not pause before any group, but when he reached the Dumontiers and Leglorieux, he stopped and made a few pleasant remarks. He stood surrounded by his courtiers, and that part of the tent was crowded while everywhere else the people were able to circulate freely. Carvajan glanced haughtily around at his attendants; then turned to Pascal.

"We seem to be somewhat closely surrounded," he said. And for the first time that evening there came a curve on his lip which might be taken for a smile.

"Is it not so wherever you are, my dear Carvajan?" exclaimed old Leglorieux, flatteringly.

"*Parbleu!* and if all his future electors were here, there would indeed be a crowd," added the banker's brother-in-law, Dumontier.

"Oh, to contain them, it would need the square before the mayoralty, and that wouldn't be large enough," put in Fleury, who had just arrived. Fleury, clean-shaven, his refractory hair plastered with pomade, which made it shine like so much wire, his shirt already rumpled and his white tie twisted like a cord, looked yet more repulsive in his evening dress than in his ordinary attire. His lips were constantly parted in the horrible smile which displayed his black teeth, and he did all in his power to attract the attention of Pascal, who was standing motionless and silent.

"Ah, speaking of electors, we must begin to think



about the approaching elections," resumed the elder Dumontier. "The dissolution of the General Council takes place this year, and I suppose we are going to arrange so that we sha'n't be taken in as we were seven years ago."

"Begging your pardon, Monsieur Dumontier," said Pourtois, venturing to join in the conversation; "but if his worship will stand this time I'll answer for the result. I have Clairefont, Couvrechamps, La Saucelle and Pierreval all ready to follow my lead, without mentioning the suburbs of La Neuville. Tondeur answers for the votes of the wood-cutters, and as for the valley, that's your and Monsieur Leglorieux' affair. Only let us mind what we are about and we shall have a big majority—and I know what I am talking about. The old owl up yonder has nothing left him but to get out of his nest."

"And after that will come the election for deputy," added Fleury. "All in good time."

Carvajan's tanned face became a sombre red. His eyes gleamed beneath his thick gray eyebrows, and for a moment his heart throbbed wildly. But he was far too much master of himself to allow his joy to be seen. He gave a careless gesture, and answered coldly:

"We shall see about it. The present moment is an ill-chosen one to form such plans, and, besides, we must expect opposition."

And he glanced towards the opposite corner of the ball-room, where the representatives of the provincial aristocracy had instinctively gathered together, apart from the plebeian throng.

Madame de Saint-André had just arrived with her son and three daughters. The old Marquis de Couvrechamps, who had commanded the mobile troops during the war, and had displayed so much decision at the battle of Buchy, sat surrounded by several of his former soldiers, who were now steady-going family men, but who delighted to remember the days of hardship and danger now that they enjoyed peace and security. The little Viscount d'Eden-nemare was paying marked attention to young Madame Tourette, whose husband—a Paris stock-broker—had recently bought the magnificent estate of La Barellerie, situated a couple of miles from La Neuville, while the Dowager Baroness de Saint-Croix was the centre of a little circle which she was delighting with her conversation.

There was a violent contrast between the group over which Carvajan reigned so triumphantly, and that formed by the large estate owners of the district. On the one side, everyone had dressed as for a grand ceremony, on



the other, everyone had affected extreme simplicity. The one showed that the ball was the one opportunity of amusement that was open to them. The others, that they had only come to look on for a short time, and, as Madame de Saint-André said, to honor the fete with their presence.

Pascal, indifferent to all that was going on around him, deaf to the flattery of his father's partisans and blind to their smiles, was leaning carelessly against one of the supports of the tent, vainly seeking amidst the rival faction for her who was the centre of all his thoughts. He soon attracted the attention of the Baroness de Saint-Croix, who leaned towards the young and elegant Monsieur Tourette, and asked:

"Who is that handsome man over there amongst the crowd of Monsieur Carvajan's courtiers?"

"He is his son; did you not know?"

"Really? I should never have thought it. He looks quite a gentleman."

"And not only that, but he is a man of true merit," went on the stock-broker. "He was recently chosen to smooth away the difficulties which had arisen between Nicaragua and the Panama Canal Company, and it appears that he acquitted himself excellently well."

"He seems to resign himself to boredom in quite a superior way."

"He does everything in a superior way."

At this moment there was a general movement, and all heads were turned towards the entrance. The sub-prefect had arrived, accompanied by his secretary. Pourtois hurried to meet him, and led him with many bows to Carvajan, whose *prestige* was greatly increased by the deference shown him by the Government authority.

At this moment, indeed, the mayor seemed king of the fete. It was he to whom everyone turned his attention, and none to whom he had uttered a command would have dared to disobey. At a sign from Pourtois the music struck up, and all the openings leading into the garden were at once crowded with spectators watching, glass in hand, this animated picture.

Carvajan had just gone half the round of the tent when the blue and white striped curtain which hung before the entrance was raised, and Robert de Clairefont entered with his sister on his arm. Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice and Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil followed about twenty paces behind the two, and, as if fate had chosen to show the relative strength of the antagonists, the children of the marquis stood alone, opposite Carvajan surrounded



by all those who, either from hatred or interest, were ready to support him.

Pascal was seized with a terrible dread as he saw them facing each other like adversaries on the eve of combat. His heart stopped beating, and for some seconds his very being was concentrated in his eyes. He longed for the whole room to fall to ruin, he tried to imagine some sudden interference which would prevent the situation from being sustained to the dreaded end. He thought of rushing to his father, whom he could see sneering with an air of bravado, of seizing him and dragging him away. Anything seemed preferable to what appeared inevitable.

After a slight, momentary pause, the two groups had again resumed their onward course. Robert, his head held well erect, did not deviate an inch from his path. He was walking straight towards Carvajan, and on his determined face his resolution not to give way a step was plainly marked. Antoinette, who had suddenly turned very pale, was vainly pressing her brother's arm and trying to direct his steps away from the official party, but Robert in his power, drew her along with him without an effort. Carvajan, his face dark with hatred, and his head lowered like a bull about to rush upon his victim, came steadily on.

"Robert, please don't," whispered Antoinette.

"Do not interfere," returned the young count between his clenched teeth. "He will give way to us, or I will walk over his body."

A deadly silence had fallen on the room, and the encounter, of which it would have been impossible to tell the consequences, was on the point of taking place, when, quite innocently, the sub-prefect saved the situation. Catching sight of Antoinette, who was now close to him, he made a gesture of admiration, and stepped aside from the mayor with a polite bow, leaving the way clear. Antoinette, who had been suffering agonies, breathed again as she saw an open path before her, and she could not help bestowing a grateful smile upon the official. Then, passing beside Carvajan, who was trembling with suppressed rage, she hastened towards the corner where all her father's friends were gathered.

Carvajan had turned round. He heard a deep sigh close to his ear, and looking up saw Pascal, pale from the emotion he had just passed through.

"Who is that charming young lady?" asked the sub-prefect, putting on his eye-glasses to see her better.

"She is Mademoiselle de Clairefont," answered Carva-



jan with sombre sarcasm. "And you have just accorded her a flattering reception she was very far from expecting, sir."

"Oh, pshaw! She's a pretty woman," answered his companion gayly. "I am ready to fight the father on political ground, but, in the meantime, I claim the right to admire the daughter."

"Don't express your admiration too openly, though, unless you want to find yourself mixed up in a quarrel with the young boor who is with her. There, see what he is doing now."

When he reached the little group formed by the nobility, Robert had looked round to find seats for his aunt and sister, but the benches were already over-crowded. The Dowager Baroness de Saint-Croix had taken up her position in a corner beside the official daïs and was doing her utmost to persuade Mademoiselle de Clairefont and her aunt to stay near her. Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil was just talking of bringing in a couple of chairs from the garden, when Robert, noticing the chairs set out for the notabilities of La Neuville, said aloud:

"Ah, here's just what we want. Are ladies to put up with rush and cane seats when the Corporation lounges on velvet? That's very unlikely."

And reaching over the rail, he took the two chairs standing next the principal arm-chair.

The others gave a stifled laugh at this act of audacity. Pourtois, dumb with awed amazement, looked alternately at the mayor and young count, hesitating between his desire to please Carvajan and his fear of angering Robert. The rest stood in silence, wondering whether their chief was going to allow himself to be thus openly braved.

"I think it behooves us to set an example of moderation and patience," said Carvajan; "for if we took any notice of Monsieur de Clairefont's provocations, conflicts might result which would cast a shadow over the fete. Therefore let us regard his acts as if they had not taken place. Besides" he added in a lower voice, "his deplorable habits of intemperance have slightly impaired his intellect, and he is not always master of himself."

"It looks bad to see the daïs empty when all the rest of the room is crowded," said the sub-prefect. "Could it not be occupied by some ladies?"

"Yes, you are right."

Fleury and Pourtois had already hurried away, and were now escorting Madame Dumontier and Madame Leglorieux to the empty chairs, to those worthy dames'



infinite delight.

"There's a good move," remarked Madame de Saint-Croix sarcastically. "Now they're in their right place."

"Suppose we go and pay our attentions to Madame Dumontier?" proposed handsome young d'Edennemare.

"Dumontier's grandfather paid enough attention to us, when he was my mother's servant," said Madame de Saint-André, sharply.

"It is as the Maréchale Lefebvre said, under the First Empire: 'Now we are the princesses!'"

"These women from La Neuville are too awful," said Robert. And turning to the young men standing around him: "Shall we pay them back by asking the little peasant-girls to dance, and leading off the ball with them?"

"Well, some of them are pretty enough to make it anything but a sacrifice," said Tourette, staring through his eye-glass at Rose Chassevent who was just coming in, followed by Roussot.

Attired in her best, the girl walked down the room with easy, smiling grace. She was wearing a dress of sateen covered with sprays of flowers, open in the front and finished off with a little muslin fichu knotted on the breast with blue ribbons. The sleeves reached only to the elbow, where they were met by the long mittens which covered her plump round arms. She had not an ornament or even a flower in her fair hair, and in her hand she carried the scarf which she had worn over her head to come to the ball.

The shepherd, as dazzled by the bright light as an owl at mid-day, walked close behind her. All his clothes were brand new, as he had told Rose they would be, and his gray alpaca blouse was fastened with a silver clasp. He had made a most careful *toilette*, and his red hair, which generally hung wild about him, was parted on his forehead, giving an expression at once grotesque and frightful to his freckled face.

"But who is the monster who keeps so close beside her?" asked Viscount d'Edennemare.

"Our shepherd. An idiot who has been brought up on the farm," replied Robert.

"What a funny page for her to choose!"

Rose, seeing Antoinette, came up to her and smilingly listened to the compliments her young mistress paid her upon her appearance.

"But it's one of your own dresses I have on, mademoiselle. Don't you know it again? You gave it to me last spring. Of course I've altered it; a girl in my posi-



tion can't wear things made like her betters'. But it suits me, doesn't it, and it still looks nice."

"It is you that sets it off," said Mademoiselle de Clairefont, with an indulgent smile. "There, child, go and enjoy yourself, but don't stay dancing too late, because, you know, I shall want you to-morrow morning."

"Oh, don't fear, mademoiselle, I sha'n't be a minute behind time."

"And don't keep your shepherd dangling at your heels all the evening," cried Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice. "That fellow's enough to frighten off all your partners."

"I am going to give him into my father's care, mademoiselle."

"And he'll make him drink, and then in about an hour's time he won't know his right hand from his left."

"Oh, I think he will," answered the girl with a smile. "And besides, what does it matter, as long as he leaves me alone? Still, I've promised to dance once with him, and I must keep my word."

Then she went away, while all the men looked after her, captivated by the charm of her glowing youth.

Antoinette sat silent and thoughtful in the midst of all the animation, the heat and the tumult. Twice already Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil had made some remark to her, and had hardly received any answer.

The first face she had seen on entering the room had been Pascal's. She had seen him blanch when Carvajan and Robert had so nearly come into personal contact, and she knew that he had shared her dread. The knowledge that he had participated in her anxiety had left a deep impression upon her. Was he her companion in misfortune? Ought she not, unless she wished to be unjust, to except him from the hatred which she had vowed towards all who bore the name of Carvajan?

She timidly raised her eyes and looked round for him. He was standing with folded arms, and looking as sad amidst all this revelry, he the son of the victor, as she, the daughter of the vanquished; and she wondered what could be passing through his mind.

As if he had felt that Mademoiselle de Clairefont's attention was fixed on him, Pascal raised his head, and their eyes met. He at once turned his aside, after a bow so respectful that it was almost a prostration. Then he slowly moved away and disappeared, as if to convey the meaning: "You hate me, but I reverence you. My presence may cause you annoyance or displeasure; therefore I will remain out of sight." What better could he



do, since he had no right to approach her, than to testify his fervent adoration from a distance? There was more real devotion in this voluntary self-effacement than in the most impassioned prostrations.

A nudge from her aunt brought the young girl back to a sense of her surroundings. The noise in the tent had increased. Couples hurried by, stopping to engage in animated converse with those they met. On the dais Carvajan was standing beside Madame Leglorieux, eagerly scanning the moving crowd, and Félicie, crimson to the middle of her chest, was impatiently tapping her foot.

"Where the deuce can the boy have got to?" muttered the mayor. "He was here not five minutes ago."

"Yes, and he didn't look as if he was enjoying himself, either," added the heiress of the Leglorieux, spitefully.

"No doubt he thought the dancing was being delayed too long," insinuated Fleury. "Wait a second; I'll find him." And the magistrate's clerk hurried outside.

"They are taking their places for the first quadrille," said Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice to her niece. "I think you ought to dance it."

"May I have the honor of this dance, mademoiselle?" asked the elegant Tourette.

"I am sorry, sir," answered Antoinette, "but it is the only time I shall dance, and I have promised Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil."

"Well, it is his right," assented the stock-broker. "I will ask one of the Saint-Andrés to take pity on me, for I can't in decency dance with my wife."

"Thank you a thousand times for the favor you have bestowed upon me, dear Antoinette," whispered Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil. "But are you so kind and sweet only to make yourself the more keenly regretted?"

Mademoiselle de Clairefont smiled and placed her finger on her lips; then, taking her partner's arm, she took her place just before her aunt with Mademoiselle de Saint-André and the stock-broker on the one side and Viscount d'Edennemare and Madame Tourette on the other.

The dancers were forming into two lines the whole length of the room. As the couples in turn found themselves top and bottom, they advanced to the centre and changed partners, thus mingling in momentary fraternization every rank and condition present. This dance had been the custom for generations past, and it often happened that the lord of the manor stood opposite his smallest tenant, and the lady of the chateau had the farmer's daughter for her *vis-a-vis*.



Once this opening quadrille over, everyone was free to amuse himself as he pleased, and the ball became the scene of a violent animation which, thanks to repeated libations, often became a sort of bacchanalia. This wild scene was well known, and, about nine or ten o'clock, when the mode of enjoyment began to get more ardent and more rough, the ladies from the chateau and the tradesmen's wives from the town went away with their daughters, leaving the rest to make merry with a fury impossible to control.

But for the present the dancers were serious, orderly and a little constrained. The men chatted in low tones and the women spent the time, until the signal should be given to commence, in smoothing down the pleats of their dresses and in drawing themselves up and giving themselves the coquettish airs of young pigeons. Feet were already tapping the floor in their impatience to begin, but opposite Antoinette, who happened to stand in the centre of the line, one place was still empty.

Robert, who was standing near his aunt, was looking vaguely round in search of some one to be his sister's *vis-a-vis*, when Pascal, with the triumphant Mademoiselle Leglorieux on his arm, appeared, looking very embarrassed and as if he regarded his task as one extremely distasteful to him. Fleury was guiding him through the crowd. When he reached the vacant place the clerk turned towards the dais and cast a questioning look at Carvajan. The latter made an imperious gesture, as if to say: "Yes, that is where I intend him to stand." Then Fleury stepped back from before Pascal, leaving him opposite Mademoiselle de Clairefont. Pascal's knees shook under him, his sight grew dim. Then a hand was laid on Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil's arm, and Robert's voice was heard saying in loud, firm tones:

"Come back to your seat, my dear fellow. My sister will not dance."

Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil looked at his friend in amazement, and not understanding what Robert meant:

"What is the matter?" he asked, amidst a profound silence.

"The matter is that the man who has just taken the place opposite you is the son of Monsieur Carvajan," replied Robert.

"Ah? That is indeed annoying," said Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil, in the calmest tones.

He glanced coldly at Pascal, who had turned livid, and bowing to Antoinette as though to ask her pardon for



having involuntarily exposed her to a degrading contact: "Forgive me, mademoiselle," he said. Then he led her back to her seat.

The mayor, who was still standing, looked at this strange spectacle as if he doubted its reality. Could it be possible that he had received such an affront in public—so crushing a reply to his insolent provocation? Were these Clairefonds really making a display of haughtiness when he thought to have them at his mercy? He trembled with rage, and his yellow eyes glittered like a tiger's in the darkness. He turned towards those surrounding him, and his eyes met nothing but countenances expressive of gloomy constraint. He looked at his son, and saw him mad with excitement, full of a wild longing to avenge himself, and yet dismayed at the thought that the man on whom he would wreak his vengeance must be either the brother or the *fiancé* of Antoinette.

Mademoiselle Leglorieux happily found a means of lessening the tension of the situation. Her eyes opened to their fullest extent, she turned from white to red, from red to white, uttered a piercing scream, and, throwing herself into her mother's arms, gave way to a fit of hysterics which relieved her from the necessity of making a clearer statement of her opinions.

At the same moment the orchestra struck up loudly with the first bars of the quadrille, and the two lines of dancers, delighted at the relief from their painful constraint, advanced and retired amidst a cloud of dust.

Antoinette, seated beside her aunt, had no time to realize what had happened. She found herself at once surrounded by her friends, and obliged to listen to a concert of exclamations and commentaries, which blended into a tumultuous buzz like that of a hive in uproar, while the men stood grave and silent beside Robert and Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil.

The commotion on the official dais was no less. The mayor had just left it, and, heedless of Madame Leglorieux's lamentations, had hastened towards Pascal, who had remained standing like a statue a little behind the dancers, and was watching with unseeing eyes the long line advancing and retreating in measured time. The sound of the instruments rang in his ears with a blatant noise which stunned him; and in the confusion of his mind the same thought returned to him over and over again: "You have been insulted because of her and in her presence." Then his hands clenched tightly, and he resolutely determined not to remain passive beneath the



outrage. He must make some one answer for it. But whom? Robert? It was he who had spoken the words, it was he who had caused this public scandal. And yet it was the other whom he hated, the one who had coldly acquiesced. And he longed to go to this calm, high-born man and strike him, and to risk his life against his.

Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil had Antoinette on his arm when the insult was uttered, and his smile was yet more insolent than Robert's words. And besides, was he not her *fiancé*. Ah, that was the real motive for Pascal's fiery thoughts, that was what had brought this pallor to his cheek. He was tortured by jealousy still more acutely than by anger. He wanted to show Mademoiselle de Clairefont that he was also proud and to be feared.

He felt some one take his arm and try to lead him away, and looking up he saw his father.

"Do not stay here," said Carvajan. "Come with me."

But Pascal resisted, saying in a voice that shook:

"Leave me alone. All is not yet finished. I will not leave this room."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Do you think I am the man to endure such an insult and not demand reparation?"

"You are mad!"

"Then you advise me to slink away and be thought a coward by everyone here?"

Carvajan's face assumed a terrible expression. He pressed his son's arm yet more closely.

"You wish to fight with those men? You are mad, I tell you. Leave me the task of avenging you. My way will be more sure and more prompt."

"More sure and more prompt!" exclaimed his son. "You will see!"

The quadrille had come to an end, and the men were leading their partners back to their seats. Pascal strode towards the circle, in the midst of which were standing Robert and Monsieur Croix-Mesnil, and approached Mademoiselle de Clairefont's *fiancé* so closely that his chest almost touched his shoulder.

"Sir," he said, with an insolent look in his eyes, his hands working nervously, "I have a few words to say to you. Would you be so kind as to step aside a moment?"

The baron bowed, and was just about to follow Carvajan's son, when Robert barred the way.

"Gently, gently," he said with a sneer. "I fancy there is a mistake. It is not with you, my dear fellow, that the gentleman has to deal, but with me. You only ceded



to my wishes. It was I who said —”

“I did not hear your words, and I do not wish to notice them,” interrupted Pascal, fiercely. “It was this gentleman who insulted me. It is he alone I deem responsible.”

“Oh, well, there is one way at least of settling the question,” exclaimed the young count, and drawing back a pace he was on the point of committing some act of violence, when his sister stepped, pale and trembling, between him and his opponent.

“Robert, please go away,” she said gently.

“But —” he expostulated.

Two tears fell from the girl’s eyes and were at once dried on her burning cheeks. She stretched out her hand in a gesture of queenly authority.

“Go,” she repeated. And as the young man gave way and obeyed her, she turned to Pascal and said :

“You are perfectly right, sir. Reparation is due to you. I was the cause of the insult you have received— I should apologize. Will you be so good as to forgive me?”

Carvaján’s son saw her bow before him. He tried to speak, but his lips only moved without articulating a sound; and, far more deeply hurt by Antoinette’s proud humility than he had been by Robert’s insolence, he staggered away.

“Where are you going?” asked his father, meeting him at the door. “Remember what you said but a moment ago. Do you wish to look as if you were running away?”

“Ah, what do I care?” cried the young man, continuing to move onwards to the darkness outside, as if he longed to hide his despair.

“Do you not wish for revenge?” said Carvaján as they reached the road. “Speak but the word, and I will put all those who have outraged you at your mercy.”

“Never!”

“Then what do you intend to do?”

“To go away. To leave forever, this time, the land where I find nothing but strife and bitterness. To go far from these struggles, these quarrels, these snares and treacheries. To forget all, even the name that you have made so heavy a burden for me to bear.”

“Pascal!”

“Father, you have sworn hatred, and therefore I must not be astonished if we are insulted and scorned. But I could not live thus. I prefer to go away.”

“It will be said that you were afraid.”

“Very well.”

“Then you will desert me?”



"You do not need me, father. You have given ample proof of that."

"Then it is I who will cling to you," said Carvaján, slipping his arm under his son's. "You want to go home—let us go. To-morrow, when you are calmer, we will discuss matters."

And turning their backs on the dancing-tent, the two men started in the direction of La Neuville.

Inside the tent, the excitement caused by Mademoiselle de Clairefont's interference had not yet subsided. Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice, who at the first had been simply petrified, had at last regained her senses, and, turning a face as black as any thunder-cloud towards her niece, she muttered:

"And pray what is the meaning of all this? Are you going mad? Here are you being all that is polite to this young rogue, when he deserved a thorough good lesson for his impertinence."

"No, aunt, no. It is we who have been wrong all through. We should not have come here, where we knew we could expect nothing but unkindness. And, above all, we ought not to have provoked that young man—"

"But didn't you see that old knave, his father, laughing in anticipation at the good joke he was preparing, by exposing you to stand face to face with his son?"

But Antoinette sadly shook her head.

"Do not let us attack this man; we cannot come off victorious. Let us give way—it is the best thing to do."

She turned towards the door, leaning heavily on Croix-Mesnil's arm and looking thoroughly exhausted. Aunt Isabelle followed with Robert. When they reached the carriage, which old Bernard had waiting for them, Mademoiselle de Clairefont tried to make her brother get in with them; but he refused, saying he did not feel inclined to return home yet.

"What are you going to do?" asked Antoinette, filled with anxiety.

"What I do every year at the ball—enjoy myself, in spite of that spoil-sport, Carvaján."

"Promise me that you will not re-commence the quarrel. Oh, do come with us! You make me feel so nervous; it seems as though some misfortune is going to happen."

"Little one," Robert said, "I think you interfere a great deal too much with what does not concern you. Go home to bed and sleep soundly; that's the best thing for a child of your age. As to the way in which I ought to act, it is already traced out; and your advice will not



have the slightest effect. Now, good-night."

He put his arm round his sister's waist, lifted her up as if she were a feather, kissed her, and placed her inside the carriage. He shut the carriage door, told the coachman to drive on; then, softly whistling, walked across the inn garden to the dancing-room. In the garden the rustics were enjoying themselves with perfect freedom from all constraint or mock modesty. There they sat, in the warm night air, through which fled the bats, brushing as they passed, the Chinese lanterns which shone forth amidst the verdure; drinking, and shouting at the top of their voices and thumping the tables with all the might of their clenched fists.

Robert went on his way, and had almost reached the ball-room when he heard someone calling to him from an arbor where the Chinese lanterns had been put out. Illumined only by the flame from an immense bowl of punch, Messieurs d'Edennemare, de Saint-André and some more of the young count's friends were seated round a table.

"All the ladies are gone. Don't go into the tent; it is stifling."

"I have still something to do there."

"If you are looking for the mayor and his son, they have just left."

"Never mind, I mean to show myself so that all the rabble who stand up for Carvajan may be well aware that I don't mean to give way an inch."

"Oh, my dear fellow, they know that already. Come and sit down with us."

But Robert was already inside the tent.

The aspect of the ball had materially changed within the last few moments. The departure of the "quality," as the *chatelains* were termed, had put an end to all restraint, and now everyone was enjoying himself in the way he thought best. The couples had thrown aside their affected propriety, arms were held tightly round yielding waists, and the orchestra itself, as if infected with the general *entrain*, played quicker and quicker and louder and louder, as if it were a struggle as to which would win the day—the lungs of the musicians or the legs of the dancers.

The young count sought vainly for Carvajan and Pascal. As his friends had told him, they had left the place. The sub-prefect, thinking that he had made sufficient sacrifice to his popularity, had also gone back to La Neuville, accompanied by the *commissaire central* and the captain of the *gendarmerie*. Robert walked slowly round



the tent, passing in and out among the different groups, and finding a delight in boldly meeting the glances of all. The ascendant still exercised by the Clairefont family, in spite of its well known decadence, caused most heads to bow as the young man went by, and, as Carvajan was not there to see, people bestowed their best smiles upon his opponent.

After all, how could anyone tell what might happen? Several times, during the last few years, the marquis had been said to be on the eve of utter ruin, and, yet, he was still afloat. It was as well to leave a way of escape, in case this tiresome old man, who died so hard, should yet find a means of getting out of the banker's clutches.

And besides, Fleury and Tondeur, Carvajan's faithful followers, were setting the example, and were out-doing themselves in polite attentions to the young count; and it was in the full enjoyment of this false triumph that Robert's friends found him, when they returned to the ball-room to carry out their plans of dancing a little with the pretty peasants.

A sort of local *bourrée*, quick and lively as a farandole, was just drawing to an end, and amongst the maddest dancers Roussot was distinguishing himself by the wild fury with which he bounded and leaped. He had persuaded Rose to dance it with him, and he was carrying her along as if she were a feather, while his supple body swayed, and his strong pliant limbs bent flexibly beneath him. He whirled round and round, leaping and springing regardless of all time or rhythm, with pale cheeks, gleaming eyes and clenched teeth, while in the intoxication of this totally novel pleasure the muscles of his face contrasted until he looked startlingly horrible.

Rose, dazed by the rapidity of her partner's movements and the furious bursts of music, let herself go, and lay half fainting with her head on Roussot's shoulder as he hurried her along, at once superb and terrible.

Gradually the breathing became heavier, the feet lost their lightness, and the music grew slower and slower until the instruments ceased to play, and with a sigh of relief the couples stopped and threw themselves on to the benches like a ship-wrecked crew reaching the land. The shepherd alone still continued his wild career, holding Rose as tightly as ever, and apparently indefatigable.

"Isn't he mad on it?" cried Tondeur. "He won't stop. He'd go on like that until this time to-morrow."

But, even as he was speaking, Robert caught Rose as she passed, snatched her from her partner's arms, and



placed her, nearly fainting, on a chair. The shepherd stopped short, and came back to Rose with a smothered growl.

"He doesn't like it!" exclaimed Tondeur, laughing till he nearly choked himself. "He's going to try and get her again."

The young count only frowned, and said to Roussot in a low voice:

"Come, that's enough. Off with you! Go and look after your sheep."

But the fellow did not seem inclined to obey, and obstinately remained standing before his partner. Robert, as easily as he might have filiped a caterpillar from a flower, gave him a back-handed blow which sent him reeling into the garden.

"Ah," sighed Rose, opening her eyes. "I nearly lost my breath altogether."

"Have a little punch, and it will all go off," said the young count gayly.

"Thank you very much," said Rose; "but I do not like strong things. I've had too many blows from father when he's been drinking. Besides, I must see about going home."

"Have you had enough dancing?"

"My word, it's too hot to dance now."

The band began playing a quadrille, and the couples moved to their places. Robert, leaving his friends, went out with Rose and took her to a dark arbor, where they were practically alone amidst all the merry-making. No one paid any attention to them; for none of these tipsy men had eyes for anything but their glasses, or ears for anyone but Chassevent, who was still singing. For some minutes the two sat in silence, listening to the noisy shouts which followed each couplet. Robert had drawn very close to Rose, and gradually his arm stole round her waist. She offered no resistance to the embrace: she seemed lost in dreams, she who was generally as lively and merry as a bird. Suddenly she shivered, and then tied the scarf she had brought with her, over her head.

"I feel quite cold," she said.

"Your throat is bare. You should be more careful;" and Robert took from his pocket a pretty blue silk handkerchief, bordered with red, and gave it to her. "See, here is something to put round your neck," he said.

She gave a little exclamation of delight as her fingers touched the soft material.

"That is kind of you," she said. "But do not let us



stay here amongst all this noise and drinking."

"Come along then," replied Robert. And rising, he stood aside for her to pass him and leave the garden. Behind them, agile and noiseless, crept Roussot.

A few yards away from the inn, they paused beside the road which wound upwards towards the Great Marl-Pit. Pourtois' tavern, the illuminated thickets and the lighted ball-room flared through the trees, but the clamor of the crowd, even at this short distance, reached their ears softened and more faint. In the transparent darkness of the night, confused forms could be discerned becoming more clearly defined as they drew nearer. They were people from La Saucelle and Couvrechamps, who, having to rise early, were going home before the ball broke up.

"Hallo, Rose," said a bantering voice, "you won't be robbed going home with such a brave gentleman to take care of you."

Robert began to laugh; but Rose was vexed, and stepped aside from him.

"You hear? They are teasing me about you. It would be better for me to go home alone."

He took her by the arm, and putting his mouth quite close against her ear, whispered softly:

"Stay with me, Rosette. We will have a talk about your father and the little house you would like."

They left the high road and turned into a path which went zig-zag up the hill until it reached the plateau. Roussot was still following them, with springy, cat-like steps, and not the dislodgment of a loose stone, or the rustle of a branch betrayed his presence. Rose and Robert walked slowly along the little path, which was so narrow that they were forced to press very close to one another. The moon had not yet risen, and the stars were good-natured enough not to shed much light. Now, they had their arms about each other as they walked yet slower than before, inhaling, as they moved, the exquisite perfume of the flowering gorse which the freshness of the night made still more odorous than in the daytime. Every now and then, like the soft rustling of wings, came the sound of kisses, and in the shadow—jealous custodian of the caressing harmony—rose a smothered growl like that of a wounded beast grinding his threatening teeth.

On and on they went with lingering steps, given up to the enjoyment of this blissful hour passed amidst the great peacefulness above, beneath and around them. The noise of the fete was now but a vague murmur in their ears, and, swayed by the power of the poetry, which rose



from the perfumed earth and fell from the glittering sky above, they pressed each other in a still closer and longer embrace. And, more sad, more irritated, more jealous moaned the voice of the mysterious watcher in the shadows.

The path was not long, and as a rule took not more than a quarter of an hour to climb; but perhaps to Rose and Robert it made itself more winding and more steep; for long after they had turned into it they were still there. Several times had the clock at Clairefont rung out its deep strokes upon the silence. Towards the east, the sky had begun to whiten, and it must have been nearly three o'clock in the morning when the pair came out near the Great Marl-Pit, at the corner of the Couvrechamps woods.

"Now, let me go," said Rose, gently. "It is quite time I was home."

"Where shall I see you again?"

"You will be able to find me easily enough if the fancy takes you to come and talk to me," replied the girl, mischievously. "But that is not very likely; for you are so fickle."

"You do not mean what you say?"

"Oh, yes, I do."

He caught her round the waist, and raising her till her face was level with his own, kissed her on the lips.

"Please leave me a little mouth for to-morrow," she said, laughing. "Good-night, or rather good-morning."

They parted and turned away, one toward Couvrechamps, the other towards Clairefont. At the turning of the road, Robert stopped and looked back, but the night was very dark, and he could no longer see his pretty sweetheart. Then he hastened home and was soon at the little park-gate.

Rose had run quickly off along the fir-bordered path, thinking with a smile of the promises the young count had made and sealed with kisses. Suddenly she started. She fancied she heard footsteps behind her in the black shadow of the trees. She was not a nervous girl; but for all that, her heart beat faster and a little perspiration broke out on her forehead at the thought. She hastened her steps, straining her ears to catch all the vague sounds of night, and again she heard a sharp crackling noise like that of a dead branch trodden by a human foot.

She was then passing the white slopes opposite the abandoned sheds which stood above the chalk-pits. To her frightened eyes the familiar place assumed a fantastic appearance and became peopled with horrid spectres. The trees overhead seemed thicker and darker. She be-



gan to run. But as she started some terrible being bounded out upon her, seized her in its arms, and with a demoniacal, mocking laugh, carried her in amongst the trees. She had strength enough to give two piercing shrieks of "Robert! Robert!"; then a hand was roughly placed upon her mouth, and she fainted from terror.

At that moment two men were following the short cut where Rose and Robert had lingered so long. The one was continually stumbling over the stones, the other was doing his best to prevent his companion from falling.

"It beats me why the pebbles are so big this evening, *sacrédié*," said Chassevent's hoarse voice.

"Eh, my boy, it's that you don't raise your feet as high as usual," replied Pourtois' shrill tones.

"And yet I didn't tire myself dancing."

"No; but you pretty well rinsed your throat."

"And you blame me for it, you ungrateful fellow. Do you think that if I hadn't bawled so loud to amuse your customers, I should have had such a thirst on me, or you such a full till?"

"Granted, old boy. And so to show you how obliged I am, I have come a little way with you to see that you don't fall down some chalk-pit."

"All right," growled the drunken old poacher; "if you have only disturbed yourself out of precaution and not from friendship, you can go home again. Now, don't persist, because I don't want you. The tighter I am, the better I can find my way." And in spite of his unsteady legs, he walked straight on, outstripping the inn-keeper, who puffed after him like a porpoise. They had reached the road to Couvrechamps, when Pourtois said:

"Let's have a minute's breathing-time, then I'll say good-bye, and go home."

They seated themselves on the edge of a ditch, and from sheer habit, Chassevent hid himself behind a bush. He took a pipe from his pocket, filled it and was just commencing to enjoy it, when his attention was attracted by a quick step on the road. He at once drew his companion down amongst the gorse and peering into the darkness with eyes well accustomed to the night, he remained on the alert.

"It's the young master from Clairefont," he whispered. "Where the dickens can he be coming from? He must have gone for a stroll before going home—followed a girl, I suppose. My girl, perhaps—he's been hanging round her for some time. Well, then, he shouldn't hinder me in my pursuits. By the way, this is the very



time to set some snares; suppose I do? I've got the things about me."

"Wait a minute," said Pourtois, rising; "I'm not going to be mixed up in that. I don't want to make the acquaintance of the Judge of Assizes. Run your own neck into the noose by all means, if you choose, old boy, but I'd rather keep mine out of it."

But before the burly inn-keeper could take a step, a piercing shriek which froze him to the earth rang in his ears; then twice he heard a name repeated with an indescribable expression of agonized terror: "Robert! Robert!"

"What's that?" exclaimed Chassevent, seizing the inn-keeper's arm.

"It sounds like some one being murdered," gasped Pourtois, whose teeth were chattering with fear.

"*Sacrédié!* We must go and see. There are two of us, and we won't let a poor wretch be killed without going to his help."

"Chassevent, don't let us go," implored the other. "It's by the Great Marl-Pit."

"Eh! if it's by hell, I'm going," replied the poacher, now completely sobered.

He started off, and Pourtois, terrified, but preferring to follow him rather than stay alone, stumbled after him through the gorse. Chassevent, with a hunter's instinct, made straight for the place whence the cry had come, and hurried in and out among the bushes without making one false step. He ran on thus about a hundred yards, with the inn-keeper always in the rear, avoiding with marvellous skill the holes and sloughs with which the ground was covered. Then he stopped to listen, holding his panting breath. In a hollow, a little way ahead, groans could still be heard, and without a word the poacher set off again, deadening the sound of his steps as much as he could. But in spite of his precaution, his approach was heard; for a confused form started up like a frightened stag, and bounded up the sloping side of the valley.

"We shall lose him! We shall lose him! Hi, after him, Pourtois! After him!" cried Chassevent, stimulating his companion to the chase, as he might have done his dogs.

Recognizing the poacher's voice, the fugitive suddenly stopped. He stooped down as if he were placing on the ground a burden of which he wished to disencumber himself; then, no longer hampered in his movements, he bounded on again with increased fleetness of foot, reached



the plateau and disappeared.

"We've lost him!" cried Chassevent. "But he's left something behind. Let's see what it is."

In a few moments they stood beside an old excavation in which the gorse had sprung up again. At the bottom lay a white form.

"It looks almost like a woman!" exclaimed Pourtois who was streaming with perspiration, in a terror-stricken voice.

"I am going down," said Chassevent. And clinging to the protruding branches, making a foothold of the stones, he scrambled to the bottom. He knelt down, stooped over the form; then, springing back with a hoarse cry:

"It's my girl!" he yelled.

At these startling words, Pourtois found wings. Half jumping, half sliding, he rejoined his friend, seized the inanimate Rose in his arms, raised her head, and without losing his presence of mind, said:

"Strike a light."

The poacher at once drew forth a tallow candle and some matches, and they were able to see.

The two men bending over the woman in this dark cavity, by the glow of the tiny light, formed a weird sight. Rose, whose face was livid, whose lips were black, and eyes glazed, had her scarf tied tightly round her neck like a cord. Pourtois, with some difficulty, unfastened it. Then a deep sigh escaped the poor girl's lips, her eyes quivered with a horrible expression of agony, then closed. She threw up her arms and fell back lifeless.

"Great God! She is dead!" said the inn-keeper.

"Oh!" yelled Chassevent. "My child, my little Rose! Who has done the deed?"

He struck his forehead with his hand; then with an expression of concentrated and indescribable hatred, muttered:

"It can only be that scoundrel Clairefont! He was there—he did it. Oh! the brute!"

"What are you talking about?" cried Pourtois. "You must be going mad. You know very well that we saw Monsieur Robert going home before we heard the shrieks."

"It was him! It was him!" returned Chassevent with increasing fury. "Oh, to take my child from me! But I'll have revenge. He shall know the worth of such a dear, sweet child as she was!"

"Oh, well, first of all, let's see if we can't do anything



for her. My house is close at hand. Let's take her there."

They raised the poor girl, whose hands were fast becoming cold and stiff, and wended their way slowly back to the inn in the twilight of the dawning day.

## CHAPTER VII.

It was only seven o'clock in the morning, but Carvaján, in adherence to his habit of early rising, had been for some time pacing up and down his office like a bear in his cage. Silence still reigned over the town, which was wrapped in slumber after the fete. The sun was climbing higher and higher in the heavens. One ray had even found its way down between the high houses into the narrow street, and after turning the panes of the office window into gold, lay in a luminous line upon the floor. The tiny atoms of dust danced like winged fairies in the golden streak, but despite the warm, happy brightness, Carvaján's face was dark and gloomy, and in his mind he was ruminating bitter and revengeful thoughts.

At the very moment that he thought success was near, and that he had but to extend his hand to grasp the reward of thirty years' hard struggle, all these unexpected incidents came to sweep him back. To hold his enemies in his hand, to have but to close it to crush them, and yet to feel again their teeth close upon his flesh more tightly even than before!

At the very moment when he expected to gain the victory over Pascal's affections by showing him the whole neighborhood cringing as one man at the feet of its ruler, his triumph was changed into humiliation, and the one whom he had wanted to win by gratifying his pride, was forced to endure the most cruel of insults.

He had been held up to public ridicule — he, the tyrant of La Neuville. For the second time, after a lapse of thirty years, this same fair of Saint-Firmin had pitted Clairefont against Carvaján. And, as if the children were hurled against each other by a fatal destiny, it was Robert now who insulted Pascal. A decisive blow must and should be struck, a blow which would exterminate the whole hateful breed.

In former days, Gatelier's shopman was not equally matched against Honoré. Now the position was reversed, and it was Carvaján who was the stronger. He had in his strong box a neatly tied packet of summonses,



judgments and distress-warrants, which could be at once enforced in default of immediate payment of a sum of a hundred and sixty thousand francs, representing the capital lent and its accumulated interest. The marquis was bound either to pay or resign himself to being turned out of his home. At last, this Clairefont would be seen upon the highway with his bundle on his shoulders, like a beggar!

In the solitude of his office, Carvajan began to laugh. He went to a chest, opened it and brought to light the safe which in the imagination of the inhabitants of La Neuville contained so fabulous an amount of wealth.

The banker drew a small key from his breast-pocket, unfastened the intricate lock, and the iron door rolled heavily back on its well-oiled hinges. But the safe was destitute of the vast sums which popular imagination was pleased to commit to its care. There were only a few rolls of gold, a check-book and some bundles of papers of different colors. Carvajan took out one of these last, which bore the name of Clairefont written in large letters, and began slowly looking through it.

As he did so, his face lighted up with a terrible joy. His fingers touched the paper with a little dry sound, crumpling it and handling it roughly as if it had been the flesh of the marquis himself. And, as he stood turning the pages of these legal documents, the banker seemed like an inquisitor polishing and sharpening his instruments of torture to increase his victim's agony.

A light rap at the door interrupted him in the midst of his delicious occupation. He glanced suspiciously at the door, and quickly closed his safe. Then he went over to his desk, and called out:

"Come in!"

"It is I, master. Please forgive me if I am disturbing you," said Fleury's voice, while his hideous head appeared at the opening of the door. Then he entered the room, and Carvajan on glancing at him saw that he looked so strange, that without leaving him time to speak a word, he exclaimed:

"What is the matter?"

"Something very serious. Half an hour ago I was awakened by Chassevent and Pourtois, who told me—but I at once dressed and hurried here," he broke off, "for I thought that you ought, as always, to be the first to know—"

"Of what?" sharply interrupted the banker, to whom Fleury's circumlocution was causing unspeakable sus-



pense. He feared that his son and Robert de Clairefont had fought secretly that morning. "Will you speak out, you blockhead?"

"Well, then—little Rose Chassevent was killed last night close to the Great Marl-Pit."

"Killed!" exclaimed the mayor, suddenly regaining all his equanimity. "How? By some accident?"

"It was a crime!" replied Fleury in stifled tones. "Her father and Pourtois found her lying at the bottom of a hollow, strangled, after they had chased her murderer for a few minutes."

"Chased him! Was he carrying her away then?"

"He was running amongst the gorse that grows on the hill-side, carrying her on his shoulders, as well as Chassevent and the other could see; for it was still dark."

"And he escaped them? He must be someone possessed of exceptional strength."

Fleury's eyes caught the mayor's, and in them the clerk read an idea so terrible, that he turned a little paler and drew his shoulders together with a shudder.

"Ah," said Carvaján, in a voice which was startling in its intensity. "This affair must be looked into, and pretty quickly, too. Has the magistrate been told? It is a case for him. What a strange thing to happen, Fleury, my boy! She was pretty, this girl. It must have been some sweetheart who did it."

"That's what Chassevent says."

"Ah, he says so, does he, the old rogue! Where is he? I should like to speak to him."

"I left him in the street. I thought I had better see you first, before bringing him in."

Carvaján hurried out to the hall. Outside the door he could hear a murmuring sound, which was sometimes drowned by a loud clamor of voices. The mayor threw open the door. There, in the midst of a crowd of neighbors, who were excitedly making all sorts of comments to each other, seated on the curb-stone was Chassevent, still more drunk than he had been the previous night, alternately lamenting and threatening.

"My poor child!" he howled, blinking his tearless eyes. "She was so pretty—she was so kind to her old father. And they've killed her, the wretches! So merry—so good-natured! Ah, the scoundrels! They bore me a grudge, that was the reason! Everyone knows how they treated me. It all comes of my friendship for our dear, good Mr. Mayor—God bless him! Ah, there's more in this business than you'd think—yes, there is! Oh, the



rascals! But I sha'n't let the matter rest! No one has the right to deprive a poor man of the consolation of his old age!"

In vain did Pourtois—who felt most embarrassed amidst all these inquisitive people who were harassing him with questions he dared not answer—try to make the tipsy old man hold his tongue; Chassevent yelled and rolled about on his stone like one in a fit of epilepsy. However, when he saw Carvajan appear on the scene, he suddenly became much calmer, and bowing as if he were going to prostrate himself on the pavement:

"Ah, here is our protector!" he exclaimed. "Oh, Mr. Mayor, take pity on a poor old man who cannot hope for justice unless you give him your help. Oh, Holy Mary, what a misfortune! The child was so well yesterday evening! And danced like a queen!"

"Come, Chassevent, be quiet," said the mayor, sternly. "It's no good raising the whole neighborhood. Pourtois, take him into my office. As for you, my good people, go home again and don't take any notice of what that poor fellow has been saying—he is mad with grief. The judge will find out the truth of the matter."

And, leaving his auditors under the influence of this well-calculated moderation, he hastened to rejoin Chassevent and Pourtois.

Leaning his back against the mantel-piece in his office, Carvajan gazed coldly at the poacher, and asked him stiffly:

"Whom do you accuse? For, if I understand you aright, you are accusing some one."

And as the old scoundrel opened his mouth to reply:

"Be careful of what you say," he added. "You are speaking to a magistrate."

"It would be all the same if I were speaking to our Lord Himself," returned Chassevent. "The young gentleman from the chateau passed close by us only a minute before the thing happened—"

"Chassevent, you know very well that he was not going in that direction," interposed Pourtois in grief-stricken tones.

"What is there to prove that he did not turn back by some by-way the instant after?" exclaimed the poacher violently. "Besides, you didn't see him—you were lying on your back, and you are so big that he might have seen you from the road."

"Were you afraid of being seen then?" asked Carvajan. "What were you doing?"



"Nothing at all," returned the old vagabond sullenly. "But every man has his own ways, and for my part I don't like running across people at night. There are so many bad ones about."

"So you wish me to understand that it might have been Monsieur Robert who—"

Carvaján dared not complete the sentence. A flush mounted to his pale cheeks, and turning a wild look towards the poacher, as if he feared the latter would retract his accusation, he said:

"Consider well the importance of such a statement."

"Eh, do you think I am going to mince my words? Besides, he was not seen only by us! The Tubœufs from Couvrechamps spoke to him at the corner of the little path by the Great Marl-Pit, just after they left the ball, and he was with the poor child then. Oh, what a wicked thing to do! A poor, pretty little thing like her! Who had never done any harm to anyone—on the contrary, who was always kind to everybody! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

"Don't shout like that," said Carvaján coldly. "There are no strangers here to listen to you, and you are wasting your breath and deafening us for nothing."

The poacher abruptly ceased his lamentations, and gazed submissively at the man who read him so truly.

"Are you aware," went on the mayor, "that if it is young Clairefont who has done this in one of those fits of violence to which he so often gives way, you might very probably, by bringing a civil action against him, get about twenty thousand francs damages?"

At these words, Chassevent's eyes looked as if they would start out of his head. All his drunken stupidity disappeared as if he had swallowed some magic draught, and he became collected and cold as stone.

"You think, Mr. Mayor," he asked softly, "that if I could make a good case, I should be able to get a good round sum?"

"I am sure of it."

"Twenty thousand francs! Oh, if you would only help me with your advice in this affair, I should be dead certain to get out of it with the bread of my old age assured to me, my dear, good Mr. Mayor."

"It is my duty to help you. You know that I have always protected the weak against the strong."

"Then they are dished!" cried the wretched old man with mad delight. He made a gesture of triumph; he could have danced with glee.



"But, Chassevent," put in Pourtois, who was in a state of utter consternation, "you know very well that the child called out: 'Robert! Robert!' Therefore it can't have been he who was holding her."

"She was screaming 'Robert!' as anyone might cry 'Murder!'" broke in Chassevent, angrily. "What is it to do with you, you great idiot? Do you think any trust can be put in what you say? You were so upset that you didn't know what you heard or what you saw. Twenty thousand francs! Of course it was that wheedling, bribing scoundrel! Who else should it be? Who else would be strong enough to run at full speed up the valley with a woman on his back? Twenty thousand francs! I tell you it was him! And if anyone pretends the contrary, he'll have me to deal with!" And the poacher turned so sinister a face to the unhappy inn-keeper, that the latter heaved a deep sigh and resigned himself to silence.

Just then Fleury rushed in quite out of breath.

"It's all going splendidly," he announced. "I've stirred up the police, and, by the way, boys, you'd better make haste back to the inn. There are some things there that leave no room for doubt, and, mind—no one is to touch them."

Chassevent was already making for the front door, pushing Pourtois on before him, with the eagerness of a miser who fears for the safety of his treasure. When he had reached the deserted street, he stopped, and pressing his companion's hand as though he meant to crush it, said:

"Now, let's have no silliness, my boy. If you ever breathe one word to contradict what I say, I'll wring your neck like a chicken's! And now we understand each other, let's get on as fast as we can."

When he found himself alone with Fleury, Carvajan paced the room for a few minutes in silence, with his head bowed on his chest. Then he paused abruptly, and exclaimed:

"I could never have wished for a better revenge! This insolent youth has attacked me and insulted my son. Well, then, I, in return, will send him as a prisoner to the assizes, where these Clairefonds will lose all—honor as well as fortune. There will be nothing left them, and I shall see them on their knees at my door, imploring mercy."

"What have Pourtois and Chassevent told you?" asked Fleury.



"*Pardieu*, they have described the whole scene of the murder, at which they assisted at a distance. Oh, Chassevent is ready to swear on his daughter's grave that it was young Clairefont who killed her. He hopes to make twenty thousand francs out of the affair."

"Twenty thousand francs." repeated Fleury with a horrible grin. "Why, for that sum he'd have killed the girl himself!"

This ghastly jest met with no response from Carvajan. He only looked sternly at the clerk, and said stiffly:

"I am very serious in what I am saying, and I wish those with me to be the same. I am convinced that Monsieur de Clairefont, who no doubt was intoxicated—a fact which will naturally acquit him of the charge of murder—committed the crime. If I thought him innocent, I should of course take no further interest in the matter."

"I am sure it was he," answered Fleury, acquiescing without the slightest hesitation. "And as I share your views, I will go and see, in the interest of the innocent, that public opinion does not flow in the wrong channel."

He bowed very low, contorted his features into a hideous grimace, and went out of the room.

It was the last day of the fair, and the farmers, having slept off the effects of their last night's drinking bout, were doing their best to drive a few more bargains. But this time, for a wonder, the market-place presented a scene of unwonted animation. Men and women were knotted together in little groups, where most excited conversation was being carried on. Could it be a rise or fall in flour or the price of sheep which gave spur to so much discussion? Hardly, for the words most frequently uttered were the names "Clairefont" and "Chassevent," and amidst the startled exclamations, the most passionate assertions and equally ardent denials were exchanged.

At the Café du Commerce, Tondeur had just repeated, in the hearing of at least twenty people, the words he had heard at the laundry-window at Clairefont, when Robert was kissing Rose: "Don't press me so tightly; you are strong enough to squeeze me to death without ever meaning to do so." And, amidst the smoke of pipes and the clinking of glasses, the timber-merchant proceeded to utter various hypocritical laments. What a pity it was! The count was such a kind, good-natured fellow! He certainly had not done it intentionally. Tondeur, who knew him so well, would answer for that—but he was so strong! And without meaning to hurt the girl, you know



—but he had more strength than he thought he had. He, Tondeur, had seen him pull up young saplings by the root, as anyone might gather a violet! As they were romping together, the girl had missed her footing—her father who was looking for her had come up with Pourtois, and not wishing to be caught, the young man had tried to hinder the little one from calling out. Ah, it was a terrible mishap! But as for being a crime—no, it certainly wasn't that.

But his audience thought that the timber-merchant was too lenient by far, and began to argue the matter with him with minds already somewhat prejudiced against the count. What! Not a crime? Then, pray, what was it? Was the girl dead, or was she not? Tondeur, put to confusion, was forced to own that she was. Still he continued his defence, taking a pleasure in bringing forward bad and illogical arguments. After all they were accusing Monsieur Robert, but was there any positive proof that he was the cause of the accident? For the wood-merchant obstinately refused to call it a crime.

“Were there any proofs?” retorted the dissenters, warming to the subject as they argued. How about the silk handkerchief marked “R. C.” that the girl had around her neck, and which no one had seen her with at the ball? And the Tubœuf's assertions? And the whole thing, in short? Anyone could see he was guilty. People must be wilfully blind to dare to say he was not. And they wondered Monsieur de Clairefont had not been arrested yet; if he had been a poor laboring man, he'd have been seen going through the town between two gendarmes long ago!

At that instant, a sort of low roar ran through the market-place, which at once attracted all the disputants to the café windows. Robert had just turned the corner of the Rue du Marché in his gig with Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil, whom he was driving to the railway station. Owing to the crowd, he could only walk his horse, and he drove slowly through the tumultuous throng, laughing and chatting with the baron. Behind him, like a living tide swept the mass of peasants and idlers, and a few cries of hatred were uttered like the desultory, impatient, first shots of a riot.

Robert turned round in astonishment, and looked at all these people who were following him.

“He is going away! Do you see, he is going to get away!” he heard them say.

He had not the slightest idea what it all meant, for at



Clairefont they had heard nothing of what had happened during the night. The chateau was like a besieged fortress where no news ever reaches the garrison. The few servants never went into the village; the farms were some distance off; Rose was the only link with the outer world, and she, poor child, would never brighten the cold, quiet old house again with her merry song and laughter. Antoinette, who had so particularly told her to be punctual, the night before, only thought with a smile when she did not make her appearance:

"She must have stayed late dancing last night in spite of all her fine promises, and is staying in bed this morning."

When he reached the station, Robert, totally unconscious of the attention bestowed on him by the gendarmes walking up and down before the entrance, jumped out of the gig, took down Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil's bag, and telling a porter to hold his horse, went into the waiting-room. The gendarmes at once moved to the platform where they stood in readiness to keep the young count back if he tried to leave La Neuville.

But the count himself was very far from suspecting what was going on. He was too deeply absorbed in his conversation to notice the strict watch that was being kept upon him. When the train came in, he gave a last pressure of the hand to the baron, and after closing the carriage door himself, left the railway station and seated himself in the gig again. He had never before felt so sorry to see his friend go, and at the railway bridge he pulled up his horse and waited for the train to pass. He saw a smiling face at the window, a hand was waived to him; then all disappeared round a curve in the line amidst a cloud of smoke. Then he went on his way again, wondering why he felt so depressed.

But Robert's moods never lasted long the same, and his hearty nature soon reasserted itself. He put his horse at a trot, and, deciding to go home through the better streets to avoid the blocks which had stopped him as he was coming, kept straight along the plane-tree walk which surrounds La Neuville. He was just leaving the outskirts of the town, when at the bottom of the hill, at the summit of which stood Clairefont, he came upon a group of factory hands hanging round the door of the inn, listening to Chassevent, who was now so drunk he could hardly stand, and who was relating for the hundredth time his daughter's death, in thick speech and with many melodramatic additions.



At the sight of Robert, a thrill of horror ran through the knot of men who huddled together in a hostile attitude. Encouraged by his companions' threatening looks, the old vagabond staggered forward, and trying to catch hold of the horse's bridle:

"Here's the murderer!" he stammered. "Here he is. Let us have revenge!"

His unsteady hand had managed to seize one of the reins, but a sharp cut from the whip on his fingers made him very quickly drop it. He reeled back, howling, and, the end of the shaft catching his shoulder, he must inevitably have fallen under the wheel if the count had not leaned down, caught hold of him, and thrown him to the inn door.

"Ah, after the daughter, he tries to kill the father!" yelled the poacher. "Come to my aid, boys! Let's take him and give him up to justice."

In a moment Robert was surrounded by men with furious faces and hands raised to strike. Some women who had come to see what was going on, began to utter piercing shrieks, and reinforcements were already hurrying down the Rue du Marché to the aid of the assailants. Chassevent, foaming with rage and drunkenness, returned to the charge and attempted to climb into the dog-cart. The count did not lose his presence of mind—he gave a sharp jerk to the reins which made the horse prance and rear; then, seizing his whip, dealt the old poacher so terrible a blow with the butt end of it, that in spite of the thick cap and the kerchief he wore on his head, he rolled over into the dust, half-stunned. Just then Fleury's head popped up beside the gig, as suddenly as a Jack-in-the-box.

"What are you doing?" he shouted to the workmen. "Pick up that man, and go and wait for me."

Then standing on tiptoe and seizing Robert's arm: "How imprudent of you! Do not brave popular indignation, but go, without an instant's delay! I have just come from Clairefont—I meant to warn you, but now your aunt and sister know all and they'll tell you what is best to do."

"But what's it all about?" asked the count, beginning to feel a little uneasy. "Are all these men mad?"

"Little Rose was murdered last night, and you are accused of the crime. Don't stop to argue—put yourself in some place of safety. Go away—that is the best thing to do."

"But it's infamous," cried Robert.

"For heaven's sake, hurry home!" exclaimed Fleury,



pointing to the crowds of people hastening up from all directions.

Without troubling himself any further about the increasing uproar, the magistrate's clerk hurried away to the mayor's house in the Rue du Marché. It was now eleven o'clock, and ever since early morning Carvajan's emissaries had been making the most of their time. The net round Robert de Clairefont was being drawn tighter and tighter every minute, and the more the unfortunate captive might try to struggle, the closer would the meshes become.

Pascal, after a restless, sleepless night passed in bitter recollection of the painful incidents which had marked his return to La Neuville, had decided finally to settle the question of his departure with his father at once.

At luncheon time, he left his room, and was about to go down stairs when on the landing he met the servant who was coming from the upper story.

"Ah, Monsieur Pascal," she said to him with a shocked and sorrowful air, "have you heard the news? The young gentleman at the chateau has murdered old Chassevent's Rose. Yes, my good sir. And the magistrate's clerk is here in Monsieur Carvajan's office, telling him how things are going in the town; for everything is turned upside down."

To Pascal's wavering eyes, the well of the staircase looked like a black abyss, at the bottom of which stood Carvajan laughing a mocking, triumphant, devilish laugh. He turned giddy, and clung to the wall to save himself, from falling. He had at once recognized the hand of his father in this terrible thrust which followed so quickly the insult he had received. If Robert was accused, the accusation had come from Carvajan. There was a cold, numb feeling all round his heart. His mind had conjured up the vision of Antoinette watching beside the deathbed of her father, dying of sorrow and despair. He remembered the sad presentiments he had had that first day as he stood at the door of Pourtois' inn, below the terrace of Clairefont. The presage of misfortune was being realized.

But had he not also dreamed that it was he who defended the forsaken girl and rescued her from her unhappy fate? As he stood at the door of the chamber which had been his mother's, he could hear again the voice of the dying woman as she murmured her last words: "Be good to your fellow creatures. You must always be good." He turned in superstitious awe, as if



he expected to see the dear form behind him. But he was alone, and bowing his head, as before a sovereign command, he whispered: "Be easy, my dear, lost mother. You shall be obeyed."

He went into his father's office with a smile on his face. As he entered, Fleury, who was talking excitedly, stopped abruptly with a look of embarrassment, and squinted horribly at him out of his startled eyes.

"Well," burst out Carvajan, crossing over to his son, "they've got themselves into a pretty mess, these proud folks who are too grand to even stand opposite us!"

"I have just heard all about it," said Pascal.

"Well, and what do you say to it?"

"What do the magistrates say to it?" returned the young man.

"The magistrates are extraordinarily slow to express their opinion. They don't know what to think between the proofs of the crime and the doubt which is the result of an honorable past. They are all for the aristocracy, at heart, and they don't like to arrest the son of a marquis. They have telegraphed to the Procureur-General, at Rouen, who, in his turn, will no doubt telegraph to the Garde des Sceaux. And all the time, the population here is in a state of ferment; and if Fleury had not happened to turn up just in the nick of time just now, the count would have been lynched by some workmen. There is something being said about a demonstration to-morrow, and, as I have just told the head of the police, if they don't arrest my young lord by this evening, I won't answer for the public peace of La Neuville."

"The best thing Monsieur Robert could do would be to go away while there is yet time," said Fleury in oily tones. "Once he is away, everyone would be quiet. I tried to make the ladies at Clairefont understand this, but at the first word I said, Mademoiselle Antoinette stood up as pale as a ghost, and, looking at me as if she could kill me, cried: 'Never! To go away would be to confess his guilt. We know with whom this calumny originated; we shall find means to prove the utter falsity of the charge!' She was clearly referring to his worship, and perhaps a little to me. But I would not be discouraged. I insisted; I gave them to understand that the roughs of La Neuville, who were in a state of great excitement, might even make an attack on Clairefont. Then old Saint-Maurice jumped up, looking as red as fire and swearing like a trooper. 'Let them come, that's all!' she said. 'We have plenty of guns and they'll find



that the women of this house are more than a match for men like them. Upstairs, in the lumber-room, there's a little swivel-gun that used to be used for fireworks; I'll have it brought down in the hall, and if anyone only touches the handle of our door, I'll give the whole rabble a peppering!" And you would never believe how the old hag swore! But there, what's the good of trying to make people see reason when they've got a tile loose? As for the marquis, he was shut up in his tower like an owl, reading some wizard's book or poisoning the air of the whole neighborhood with his chemicals. He wasn't to be seen, or else, perhaps, idiotic as he is, he could have better grasped the situation than that old lunatic let loose."

"But she does seem to understand it perfectly," said Pascal, quietly, "and she stands up for her nephew's innocence against every one. As Mademoiselle de Clairefont very truly said, to go away would be to confess his guilt, and no doubt the count has determined to defend himself. Perhaps he has substantial proofs of his innocence—a good alibi would settle the matter at once. Who knows but what one will be forthcoming?"

"I defy him to bring one forward!" cried Carvajan, losing all control over himself at his son's opposition.

"Father, you cannot tell—"

"Are you going to defend him?"

"Are you going to accuse him?"

"No, no, of course not," interposed Fleury in a conciliating manner. "Your father does not bring the accusation; why should he? His worship is only concerned, as always, for the public good. We speak freely, and weigh the for and against before you; but you may be sure that if Monsieur Carvajan could hush up this affair he would do so at once. It is true that he is Monsieur de Clairefont's enemy, and he is opposed to him on both political and financial grounds, but to draw any advantage from such a terrible misfortune! There cannot surely be any need for me to tell you he has not even thought of such a thing. Though, after all, would he not be within his rights if he had? Have his enemies ever hesitated to do their worst against him? You yourself had a proof of that yesterday evening. When I had the honor of meeting you for the first time, you had just witnessed one of those acts of violence peculiar and habitual to this young man. I told you then, little thinking to be so good a prophet, that you had arrived in time to assist at the last engagement of the war between Monsieur de Clairefont



and your father. Well, then, the combat is almost at an end; it is terminating amidst blood and mire."

"Of which we are not the cause," roughly added Carvajan, whose nerves had been irritated by Fleury's honeyed dissertation. "Devil take them! Let them get out of the fix the best way they can. I have no cause to be fond of them, and you'd see how much consideration they'd show me if I were in their place."

After the first shock, the inmates of Clairefont had promptly set their wits to work to find out what had better be done, and Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice, Robert and Antoinette had held a council in the little drawing-room. Fleury's assertions and the excitement in the streets had certainly some meaning in them. Old Bernard was sent to the farm for news, and brought back a confirmation of the report—Rose was dead, and Robert was accused of killing her. Between Aunt Isabelle's imprecations and Antoinette's terrible calmness, Robert experienced, one after another, the most opposite and contradictory sentiments. Sometimes he told himself that the accusation against him must fall through of itself and would have no result, and with a nervous laugh he promised himself ample revenge on those who had instigated the charge against him. Again, he would try to amass all the proofs he could give of his innocence, only to find to his horror that everything united to give him the appearance of guilt. He had reached home in the small hours of the morning, and had entered by the little door in the park, unseen by any one. And he had spent the whole of the time which had elapsed between his departure from Pourtois' inn and his arrival at Clairefont, in the path leading to the Great Marl-Pit. People had met him and spoken to him there; his presence was undeniable.

And as he remembered the pleasant moments he had passed, that warm, fine night, with the pretty, laughing girl, his heart was torn with grief. Had he not involuntarily been the cause of the misfortune by keeping Rose so late when she had wanted to go home? He had only managed to make her stay by dint of much pleading and persuasion. "Let me go," she had said. "Your sister will be waiting for me to-morrow morning, and I shall have you to thank for a scolding. If you have still so much to say to me, you can come to the laundry window, and we can talk as I work." When she had spoken thus, the roads were full of people. She would have gone back to Couvrechamps with them, and, instead of lying cold



and still, she would now have been running briskly about, singing and laughing merrily. Tears sprang to his eyes at the thought, and the big, strong man began to sob like a child.

The two women looked at him in terror. A feeling of modesty froze the questions on Antoinette's lips. What had passed between her brother and Rose? No doubt some love scene, begun at the ball and broken off forever by the mad act of a jealous lover, and to learn the facts, and to arrive, perhaps, at the truth, it needed some one to question Robert, to draw an explanation from him. But there was Aunt Isabelle there to get at the root of the matter. She would not mind asking, and with her the young man would have no constraint in answering, and then they would know what line of defence would be best to take up.

It was impossible for the error not to be very soon discovered. Justice was clear-sighted and unprejudiced. Public opinion, the tide of which, so Fleury said, was turned so furiously against Robert, had been misled by false statements, the propagator of which it was not difficult to guess. Carvajan's hand was plainly recognizable in this work of hatred. He had been provoked, and he was taking his revenge. And the Clairefontes had but too good reasons to know with what deadly tenacity he clung to any scheme he took in hand.

Their principal care was for the marquis to know nothing of what was going on. They could not bear the thought of the father hearing of the accusation against his son, and they were resolved to prevent the knowledge reaching him at any cost—the tranquillity of the aged man must be preserved before all.

"We had better take the marquis to Saint-Maurice," Aunt Isabelle had said at once.

But Antoinette, always able to see what was best even amidst the darkness of despair, had replied:

"He cannot be safer anywhere than at Clairefont. Shut up in his turret he might as well be a thousand miles away from any one. It must be our care to see that no one gets in to see him. He never reads the paper, never goes out, and whatever may happen, he will remain in tranquil ignorance of it. If we should be absolutely compelled to tell him anything, we can at least choose our opportunity, and can judge how much we had better reveal."

The hours passed by, strengthening their courage as they fled. Was not this lapse of time a proof of how



baseless were their apprehensions? Surely, if the law intended to take any steps in the matter, it would not be so long in putting itself into motion. Alas! They were unacquainted with the procedure of modern legislation. They never dreamed of the hesitation of the magistrates, the plotting of Carvajan, and the secret watching of the police. And so, like an animal caught in a snare from which he can find no issue, they waited in silent stillness, feeling alternately the maddest hope and the deepest despair.

Every day, about four o'clock, when the heat had somewhat subsided, the marquis was in the habit of coming down from his turret, and taking a turn in the park. Antoinette would not have missed this walk for anything in the world; she had always put on her hat beforehand, and when her father left his study, he would find his pretty companion awaiting him. But to-day, in the fever of their anxiety, they had all forgotten the marquis. He entered and reached the middle of the drawing-room before either of them heard him, and, laying his hand on Antoinette's shoulder:

"Well, must I come in search of my Antigone to-day?" he asked, smiling.

They rose trembling to their feet. The appearance of the head of the family had increased the horror of the situation twofold. Robert was the first to regain his presence of mind.

"Ah, father, you are earlier than usual to-day. But it just happens right; for now we can all go out together. I want you to take my arm instead of Antoinette's. She will resign you to me for just this once, I know."

There was an accent of so profound a melancholy in the young man's voice that Antoinette's eyes filled with tears. To her it seemed that her brother was about to take his last walk in this beautiful park, where they had played when they were children, beside his father, who was totally unconscious of anything being wrong. She could not trust herself to speak, and acquiesced in Robert's words by a bend of her head.

The old father, leaning on Robert's arm, was already going down the steps, talking as usual of the work with which he had occupied his day. Aunt Isabelle, lingering behind, uttered a moan, and pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Antoinette, I *cannot* live with such a weight upon my mind," she sobbed. "No, it is more than I can bear. I feel I shall not get over such a dreadful shock. Rob-



ert, my nephew, the last of the Clairefontes and the Saint-Maurices, arrested like a common thief! Suppose he did squeeze the girl a little too hard, where was the harm?"

Antoinette turned pale, and darting a fiery glance at Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice:

"Aunt! Can you for a moment admit—"

"How do I know? His father did just the same when he was young. Only, in those times, the girls did not defend themselves so vigorously—or didn't die of a squeeze."

"But he has given us his word that he knows nothing about this unhappy event!"

"So he has! Ah, I am going mad! You know how I love the dear boy—more than I ought to, I'm afraid; I would give all the rest of the family for him. But I am being well punished for my idolatry, for my suffering is awful. A hardened old woman like I am must have a terrible grief before she gives way as I am doing—my poor Robert! My dear boy! Oh dear! Oh dear!"

And in a fit of utter despair, Aunt Isabelle burst into sobs. Antoinette knelt down before her, put her arms round her, and tried to comfort her.

"No," sobbed the old maid, "no! If they take him, I will go too. I will go to prison with him."

"But, auntie, you can't; it's impossible."

"And why can't I?" asked Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice, becoming suddenly calm. "I have often been told that during the Terror my ancestors went together to La Force."

"But we are not under the Reign of Terror now," replied Antoinette, unable to restrain a smile.

"Indeed! And what do you call a reign when such an abominable thing as this can happen? Ah, it is the end of all."

"Come, auntie, we must go out to papa. Try not to let him see that you have been crying."

"Don't be afraid, I won't let him know."

They were just stepping on to the terrace when the opening of the drawing-room door made them pause. On the threshold stood old Bernard, looking thoroughly scared.

"What is the matter?" asked Antoinette, aghast.

"Monsieur Jouselin is here, mademoiselle," stammered the faithful old servant.

The two women exchanged a frightened glance, and, moving as in a dream, went out to the hall, where a stout man, dressed in black, was nervously fidgeting about.



When he saw the ladies, he took off his hat, and, with great deference, said to Antoinette:

"Mademoiselle, I should like to speak a few minutes with your brother."

"He is now walking in the park with my father, sir. Must I call him?"

"I should be very much obliged if you would."

There was a deep silence. The police-officer hesitated to speak out before the lovely agitated girl. The other two had a question on their lips they dared not put into words. At length Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice could bear the uncertainty no longer.

"Have you come to take him from us, sir?" she asked, with a terrible look.

"Madame, my office imposes a painful duty upon me—"

The old maid tolerated for once the "Madame," which, under any other circumstances, she would have sharply repudiated.

"My dear, sir," she resumed with much feeling, "you are, if I am not mistaken, the son of the Jouselin who used to be my father's agent at Saint-Maurice. You are? Then there are family ties between us. You do not wish to reduce honest people to utter despair—my nephew is not guilty—though do I need to tell you that? What must be done for him to remain at liberty? If it is a question of money, it could be arranged—"

The other made a movement of astonished denial.

"There is no alternative but for Monsieur de Clairefont to come with me," he said gently; for he was really sorry for the two women. "I will show him every possible consideration in the execution of my duties—"

"I want to entreat your consideration for my father, sir," implored Antoinette. "Do not let him know of what is happening until my brother's innocence is proved."

"Mademoiselle, you see that I have come in alone—my men are outside. If your brother will give me his word to follow me without resistance, we can go without any noise or scandal. By acting thus, I hope I am proving to you that I have not forgotten what my family may have owed to yours."

Mademoiselle de Clairefont bowed her head.

"I thank you, sir," she said, "and I will answer for my brother. I will go and tell him. Auntie, you stay. You can speak to him here, without fear of being seen, before he goes."

The old man and his son were just passing the window in their walk up and down the terrace. They were talk-



ing—the marquis absorbed in the childish joy of explaining the experiment which was occupying his thoughts, and Robert trying to repress the burning tears which mounted from his heart to his eyes. It seemed to him that he was about to quit forever all that surrounded him, and he looked at the house, the trees, the flowers, and the sky, which had never seemed so bright to him before, with unwonted affection. Feelings, which he now knew for the first time, arose in his heart. He regretted his follies, he blamed himself for his idle existence, he felt bitter sorrow for any grief he had ever caused his father. He longed to make atonement for it all, and regarding his misfortune as the consequence of his misconduct, he accepted it as an expiation.

He saw his sister coming, and at once noticed the look on her face. Without giving her time to speak, he asked anxiously :

“Have you come to take my place?”

She sadly bent her head.

“There is someone in the drawing-room who wants to see you,” she said.

“I expect it is about some pleasure party,” said the marquis indulgently. “Go, my boy; don’t keep your friend waiting.”

The brother and sister shuddered at the terrible mistake. Robert put his arms round his father and pressed his quivering lips to the old man’s white hair; then he held out his hand to his sister, feeling that he dared not kiss her, or he should break down.

Having with great difficulty torn himself from Aunt Isabelle’s tearful lamentations, Robert started to accompany Jouselin to Couvrechamps. The gendarmes had gone on in front and two detectives, disguised as tradesmen, followed about fifty paces behind. As they went along, the police-officer, under pretence of chatting, skilfully questioned his prisoner, and Robert, over-excited and, besides, having nothing to hide, gave a full account of his long-standing flirtations with Rose, the ball on Saint Firmin’s day, the walk up the hill-side, the meeting with the Tubœufs, and the separation at the road to Clairefont. They reached the very spot, as he was talking.

“See, here’s where I left her,” he said. “I stood for a minute watching her till she had disappeared in the darkness; then I went on home. If I had only stopped a few moments longer, she would be living now.”

A prolonged, mournful, strident wail, like the moaning



of a beast in agony, interrupted his words. On the common, Roussot's sheep were browsing on the scanty grass as usual, but the uncouth shepherd did not make his appearance to accompany, as was his wont, the passer-by with his modulated cries and the cracking of his whip. He had hidden himself, and in vain did Robert look round for him. Again the desolate cry was heard in the silence of the lonely place, and then the two men espied him lying on his face behind a huge boulder, his head buried in his hands, unconscious of all except his grief.

"Poor fellow," said Robert. "Rose was always kind to him. She did not rebuff him like all the farm people did, and he simply worshiped her. He has lost the one joy of his life."

The village was in an unaccustomed state of excitement. As Robert and Jouselin approached the first houses of the little hamlet, some boys, who seemed to be on the lookout, broke into a shout of "Here they are;" and then took to their heels as if terror-stricken. The market-place was crowded — people had come over from La Neuville on purpose to see the son of the marquis go by between two policemen, and there was a murmur of disappointment when Robert was seen coming down the avenue of flowering lime-trees, walking in perfect freedom beside Jouselin.

"And that's what they call equality," growled the wooden-shoe maker from La Saucelle, an ultra-democrat, whose daughter Mademoiselle de Clairefont had nursed the year before when she was dying of typhoid fever. "If it had been a poor man, they'd have put the handcuffs on him."

The hands from the factories and saw-mills yelled and shouted, the crowd surged to and fro, some women uttered piercing shrieks, as they caught up their children to save them from being trodden under foot, and Jouselin instinctively seized his prisoner's arm, less to hold him than to offer him some protection. The mounted police, who were standing round Chassevent's miserable hut, hastened to the rescue, and the most ardent of the malcontents recoiled before the prancing horses, which were impatiently shaking their bits amidst the cloud of dust.

"I am sorry to have been the cause of any trouble to you," said Robert to Jouselin with the utmost coolness. "After all the good my family has done about here, I expected a little more sympathy. Ah, though, I see the reason now," he added with a bitter smile.

He had just caught sight of Carvaján in the middle of



a knot of men, talking to Tondeur.

In the background, and nearly hidden by the others, Pascal, trembling with emotion, was leaning against a garden-gate. There was a deep silence all around. Robert continued to move forward, his eyes fixed on the mayor, his head carried well up, and looking a little pale, but very resolute; and the young count seemed to increase in height as he walked thus amidst the menacing crowd.

In the little garden of the hovel stood the examining magistrate, listening to the animated conversation of a man, whom Robert guessed to be an inspector of police, and Doctor Margueron, to whom no doubt had been given the task of the post-mortem examination.

The door of the house was open, and in the darkness of the room within—which was lighted but by one window around which climbed a white rose tree—the yellow gleam of the candles standing beside the dead girl's body could be seen.

The young count breathed a heavy sigh as he looked. It was there that poor Rose was lying, silent and cold, sleeping her last sleep. He felt no terror at the thought of being confronted with the corpse—only an intense and tender pity. What had he to fear from the poor dead girl? The sight of her face might move him to tears, but it could not inspire him with terror. If, by a miracle, she could have been raised from her bier and brought to life again, he knew that her first words would have been to proclaim his innocence.

There was a movement amongst the group in the little garden. The examining magistrate had just gone into the house accompanied by his clerk, who carried a large portfolio under his arm. Jousselin touched Robert's arm.

"We must go inside," he said, quietly. Then in a lower tone he added: "They are going to confront you with the victim."

"I am ready," answered Robert.

Stretched on her bed, beside which stood a lighted candle, white as marble save for the violet shadows round her temples, with her fair hair, to which still clung some of the gorse flowers, spread all around her, lay Rose, looking as if she slept. Death had not detracted from her beauty, and her face was bright with the last sweet smile. On a table stood a copper bowl filled with holy water, into which the sprig of box which the poor girl had brought home the last Palm Sunday had been carefully put. Beside it lay the scarf with which Rose had covered her head that fatal evening, and the silk hand-



kerchief Robert had given her to put round her neck. A sunbeam had found its way through the narrow window, and was casting its gleam upon the copper bowl and crimsoning the woollen material of the scarf.

Robert, as reverent as if he were in a holy place, stood near the door waiting. Carvaján had slipped in after him, far more agitated and anxious than the man who was accused.

"Monsieur de Clairefont," said the magistrate in an ill-tempered voice, "approach the bed. You recognize the girl?"

"Yes, sir," answered the young man with firmness.

The magistrate signed to his clerk to take down the answers, and turning to the man whom Robert had taken for a police-inspector :

"Show the traces of the murder," he said.

The man uncovered the dead girl's chest, and on the pretty, rounded neck, which Robert could not look at without a lump coming into his throat, there appeared a deep, purple line. Then the magistrate spoke to Monsieur Margueron.

"Doctor, will you be good enough to state the result of your examination?"

It was evident that the kindly country doctor had never gone through such a scene before in his life ; for he shuddered, made a startled gesture, and opened his mouth to speak without at first succeeding in uttering a word, so contracted was his throat from agitation. However, he recovered himself in a moment or two, and, like a stream too long pent up, poured forth a flood of explanations teeming with medical terms. from which it appeared that having been summoned to examine the body of the girl then lying before them, he had found violent ecchymosis at the base of the pharynx at the point of union with the trachea, which had been caused by pressure from a thick cord or handkerchief, which pressure had lasted about five or six minutes, that is to say, long enough to cause death from asphyxia. He had found no other trace of violence on the body. From what he had learned from public rumor, he thought that the murderer, when he was running away from the girl's father and the inn-keeper, Pourtois, had tried to stifle his victim's screams, and that in the hurry of his flight, the gag he had placed over her mouth had slipped down the chin to her neck, and that then the man had unconsciously pulled it tight as he fled and so brought about strangulation.

Warming to the subject as he spoke, and carried



away by his own words, the doctor began to enact the scene. And it was at once awful and grotesque to see this big, gray-headed man playing this terrible comedy at the very foot of the bed on which the dead girl lay and in the presence of the man who was accused of having murdered her.

"Thank you for your report," said the judge, wishing to cut short the doctor's exuberance. "Do you acknowledge," he went on, turning to Robert, "having caused the death of Rose Chassevent during the night of the twenty-fifth to the twenty-sixth of September?"

"No, sir."

"You will make no statement of what passed between you and the victim of the crime?"

"I have already told the commissary all I know in connection with the case, but you cannot expect me to accuse myself of that of which I am innocent."

"Very well. I must hold you at my disposal."

"Do so, sir, if it is your duty," said Robert, gravely.

Then, in the growing darkness of the room, he drew nearer to the bed on which Rose was lying, bent reverently before it, and, kneeling down, whispered a short prayer. When he rose, he went to the window, broke off the most beautiful flower from the rose-tree, which was crimsoned by the rays of the setting sun, and, having dipped it in the holy water, laid it gently on the dead girl's marble forehead.

"Good-bye, poor child," he whispered with an accent of deep sorrow. Then turning to the magistrate:

"I am at your orders, sir," he said simply.

Everyone was silent, awed by the touching simplicity of the scene. Carvajan's voice alone was heard, saying:

"They have always been a little theatrical in that family. But he who wishes to prove too much, proves nothing."

Robert contemptuously shrugged his shoulders, and, not deigning to bestow even a glance upon his enemy, followed Jouselin out of the house.

That same evening, he was taken to Rouen, and incarcerated in the Bonne Nouvelle prison.

## CHAPTER VIII.

As Aunt Isabelle had foretold, it would have been a matter of utter impossibility for her not to have followed



her Benjamin. After an evening passed in fretting and champing in fits of rage that she was forced to conceal, and a night during which she seemed on the verge of losing her reason, the old maid set out for the railway-station, and Antoinette, left alone with her father, was compelled to make up a tale to account for the absence of her brother and her aunt.

Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice had had some differences with her farmer, and she had gone away for a few days with Robert to look into the matter. For a few days! But the marquis did not notice the pitiable smile with which Antoinette uttered the falsehood. Easy-going Honoré was in no wise curious or hard to please—as long as he was not jeered at and tormented about his inventions, he was always ready to let others do as they liked; and he was always too much occupied with his own thoughts and ideas to trouble much about what was going on around him. He was devoting himself still more passionately than before to his system of heating. To obtain perfection was the marquis' most pernicious hobby. An invention possessed interest for him only when it was still in the shape of an unsolved enigma—once the answer found, he thought no further of it, and his restless mind turned in search of another problem. Rarely did he rest satisfied with what he had accomplished; he always wanted something better—the better which spoiled the good. It was in this way that he managed to make the soundest enterprises failures, and to convert into a source of ruin the Great Marl-Pit, which was a mine of wealth that an intelligent, honest foreman could have worked in a manner that would have enriched his master and the whole province.

For three days past Honoré had been very silent. Even at table he ate his meals mechanically, with his eyes fixed on his plate and his thoughts evidently elsewhere.

"Father is still busy in his laboratory," Robert had said jokingly.

The marquis had not even heard the words. He was engaged in pursuing his dreams, in trying to enchain his fancies. How many millions of miles through the empty air had he thus been borne, astride his fantastic hobby, in his pursuit of the impossible! Occasionally he would burst forth in a sudden explosion of joy, and gleefully rub his hands together as he exclaimed:

"This time, I think I've got it!"

Antoinette blessed the fatal mania which, in this instance, so fortunately absorbed her father's attention.



He did not seem to notice the absence of Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice, whose seat at the table was vacant for the first time for thirty years. As for Robert, he was often away for long periods, shooting.

After dinner, which had been a short and silent meal, the marquis and his daughter sat together in the vast drawing-room which, only lighted by two lamps, was nearly all in darkness. Antoinette's thoughts fled to her brother, and she pictured him in a bare and gloomy cell, awaiting the decision of his destiny. Where was Aunt Isabelle? What had she been able to do? There must be some difficulty in obtaining leave to visit a prisoner, and perhaps she would not even see Robert. And if not she would stay, like an old, faithful dog left by its master at the door, gazing at the prison walls and finding happiness in thinking that within them was the child she loved, breathing the same air as herself and only separated from her by these few stones.

Oh, what a sad evening that was! And how slowly and mournfully the hours passed by! Left without a friend to comfort or advise her, alone with this old man who sat buried in his arm-chair, childishly nodding his head, and thinking of nothing but his foolish schemes, when misery and ruin were storming his house and entering boldly, terrible and implacable, through the breach. Oh, how full her heart of wretchedness, her eyes of tears she must not shed!

"Ha, ha!" laughed the marquis, and his laughter sent a cold chill through Antoinette. "Now, I see it all. Look, my child, the top grating in my furnace is level, and it ought not to be, because as combustion goes on, it gets clogged, and so prevents a thorough draught. The grating must be inclined; then everything will slip off it, and the heat is kept up. There! The improvement is simple enough; what do you think of it?"

"I think it will answer perfectly, papa."

"You say, 'it will answer perfectly,' as though you weren't thinking a word of what you are saying! Come, instead of staying in this drawing-room where we two poor forsaken things are lost, let us go up to my study. I will show you my model, and then you will see exactly what the improvement is. It means a fortune, little one, a fortune."

Giving way to the old man's whim, Antoinette took a lamp, and they both went up to the first story of the tower.

Out of the large room with its arched ceiling supported by finely moulded stone pillars, the marquis had managed



to make at once a library, a study and a laboratory. Along the whole side which overlooked the park, ran shelves filled with dust-covered books, while some steps on castors which ran along a groove in the floor, enabled the student to reach down any volume he needed. Before the large, arched, stained-glass window stood a massive bureau, and, near a pillar, was a drawing-table covered with plans and designs. A thick carpet covered the granite flooring of this part of the room, which was comfortably furnished with large, deep easy-chairs highly conducive to meditation and, so Robert said, to sleep.

The other side, which overlooked the principal entrance to the chateau, was devoted to the laboratory. To the huge brick furnace with its wide mantel-piece, above which was a pair of bellows with a hanging chain, had been added a little brass stove surmounted by a pipe leading into the large chimney. This was the marquis' cherished invention. On the table stood pipkins and phials of all shapes, and in a corner, beside a stone sink to which water was laid on, was a worm of stills, with a zig-zag copper neck. And in this strange-looking room, where all the baleful ideas which in thirty years had brought ruin on the family had first taken shape, the marquis was thoroughly happy.

When they entered it that night, he breathed a sigh of satisfaction, and looked at his daughter with more affection in his gaze than usual.

"It is some time since you have been up here, my pet," he said. "And you see I have a good many drawings there which are waiting for you to look over and touch up. Since we are going to be by ourselves for a few days, why don't you come and sit here with me? You would see how happily the time would pass," finished the old man with a smile.

"Very well, papa," answered Antoinette, not heeding what she was saying.

Then the delighted old marquis went to his stove, pulled out the boxes of coke, which ran on wheels and which occupied the whole space beneath the furnace, and began with the help of a large quantity of paper and shavings, to light his little stove himself. He had turned up his sleeves to his elbows, and during his operations he got himself into a terrible mess. Soon the laboratory was so full of smoke that the windows had to be thrown open; and talking, coughing and half suffocating, the inventor entered into voluble explanations, trotting backwards and forwards from the apparatus, which he said



had still a few imperfections, to the numerous drawings by which he had corrected his mistakes.

"There, see, my child, it is burning the wet shavings now. It is difficult to set it alight as it is here, because there isn't a sufficient draught, but with a factory chimney it would go of itself. Wet shavings, eh? What do you think of that? And what a heat it throws out! That's the beauty of the invention. In the plantations in America they could keep it going with the crushed sugar-canes. What do you say to that!"

Antoinette said nothing. She again remembered the horrors of the situation, and fell once more into despair. There was her brother—who was there to save the poor boy so falsely accused, and around whom was cast the dangerous net of calumny? Even if she were able to face the difficulties of their financial position, how could she help the one who was so dear to her? She had the ignorance of purity. The law as regards criminals was beyond the understanding of her innocence—it was a terrible enigma to her, and the peril which threatened Robert seemed to her at once terrible and incomprehensible.

And melancholy, dark and gloomy as a mental night, took possession of her. Her father went on talking, but she was not listening to what he said; the old man's words fell on the unheeding air, as the water dripped, noisy and useless into the stone sink; for his daughter's mind was occupied with but two ideas—how to save Robert and how to meet the bill which would shortly fall due.

At eleven o'clock, she and her father left the laboratory, and went down stairs to their bed-rooms. The marquis, delighted at having been able to develop his ideas for two whole hours, without ever stopping to know if he had been heard or not, kissed Antoinette, and left her, saying:

"I feel quite cheered up. You do not know how much good your presence does me. When I see you amongst all my apparatus, it seems as though all I have begun must succeed—you will come again, won't you? You are interested in my work, you know; for it means fortune and wealth for us all."

To Antoinette the night seemed very long. She lay with eyes wide open in the darkness, listening to the storm which was raging outside and shaking the chateau to its very foundations. These angry gusts, which swept by with never-ceasing uproar, sounded in her ears like



the roaring of the sea, and in the fever of her sleeplessness she fancied that she was indeed upon a storm-tossed vessel. The wind howled furiously round the masts and rigging, and the rise and fall of its tumultuous noise gave her the sensation of being lifted on the mountain crests or hurled into the deep valleys of the waves.

She thought that she was being borne over an inky ocean amidst a darkness through which the lightning flashed blood-red. She was dizzy by the horrible rolling of the waves, and suffered terribly. The storm grew more and more furious, filling her ears with its strident whistling and screeching, and in the agitation of her thoughts, it seemed to her that she was going to rescue her brother who had been forsaken upon a bare and narrow rock. She turned to seek the commander of this phantom ship, and by the lightning's gleam she saw that he had Pascal's face. He looked at her with gentle eyes as though he would say: "You know that I adore you; you have but to utter a word, to make a sign, and I myself will take you to your brother and insure his safety. I would do anything to make you happy. Your tears blister my heart, your grief makes me grieve also. Do not persist in your pride—be reasonable and kind, and in one moment your woe shall be at an end."

But she was implacable, and turning away her head, refused to listen to the prayer so gently uttered. Then, amidst the tossing chaos of the angry billows, the ship moved away, abandoning to his fate her shrieking brother. The night grew darker, the clamor of the wind more terrible, and the waves, which had become the color of blood, were strewn with corpses.

Antoinette, terrified, tried to put an end to this horrible nightmare. She reasoned with herself, telling herself that she was in her room, that her father was close at hand, that she was dreaming wide awake. She felt the bedclothes with her hands to convince herself, but ever and again the hallucination returned; and it was not until she had lighted a candle that, worn out with fatigue, her hair lying dank about her forehead, which was covered with a cold perspiration, she became a little calmer. Then, at last, the pale dawn came, and delivered her from this agony.

As soon as she was dressed, Antoinette went to her father, whom she found as fresh as a rose, after a night of sleep, dreamless and quiet as a child's. About ten o'clock he went up to his study, and just then, a letter, brought by one of Malézeau's clerks, was given to An-



toinette, who hastened to her room to read it. The envelope contained a note from Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice, at Rouen, and a few lines from the attorney, begging Mademoiselle de Clairefont not to forget the bill which would fall due the following day.

Aunt Isabelle sent word to her niece that she had reached Rouen about seven o'clock, and had at once been taken, by an influential friend, to the Procureur-Général, whom she had asked to set her nephew free. But, in spite of his evident willingness to do so, the procureur was not able to accede to her request. Accounts of the affair had been published in most of the papers in the department, with many inexact and untrue details, according to the custom of "those low journalist men," and it had already caused a great sensation in the town. It was also impossible for her to see Robert, who, she was told, was debarred all communication with his friends.

She was staying in the Saint Sever quarter, at a carriage-builder's, who had let her a furnished room, and she did not know now what to do next. However, in spite of her worry, the old maid did not forget the monetary troubles, and remembered to tell her niece that all the papers connected with the bill that was about to fall due were together in the chest of drawers in her room, under her handkerchiefs.

As she read this letter, which had been scrawled at five o'clock in the morning in a sprawling handwriting on common note-paper, and which had as many mistakes in the spelling as in the composition, Antoinette wept. The confession of helplessness her poor aunt had been forced to make dissipated her last hesitations, destroyed her last hopes. She resolved to do as the situation demanded, and, without even troubling to dry her tearful eyes, she went up to her father.

The marquis was seated at his desk, writing notes on the margin of a plan; but he paused in his work when he saw his daughter, and, pushing back the velvet cap which covered his head and made him look like some old alchemist:

"Ah, so you do take an interest in what I showed you yesterday, since you are here again, and so early in the morning, too," he said, gayly. "I am very glad to see you, my child. Come and sit here, near me." And as Antoinette obeyed him in silence. "But what is this I see?" he exclaimed. "Your eyes are red, as if you were in trouble. What is it? I will have you tell me frankly."

"Alas, papa, I am unable to keep silence any longer, or



else I should — perhaps more from motives of affection than wisdom — have still spared you these terrible worries.”

“Malézeau has been up to his tricks again, I suppose,” broke in the marquis with some annoyance. “Can he not arrange matters without bothering us about them? I have something else of a great deal more importance to think of. The time he causes me to lose is precious.”

“Papa, you have no time left of which you can dispose,” said Antoinette. “You have arrived at the last limit, and the impatience of your creditors cannot be appeased.”

“Have they not been told that I am on the eve of realizing important sums by means of my latest invention? If I had not wanted to make a last improvement in it, I should have already taken out my patent, and I should be drawing my profits from all the great industries of the world. For you saw yesterday evening what a success it is, little daughter. You cannot deny it — it is certain, evident, palpable. And in a few days —”

“You have but a few hours left you.”

“Eh? Are these rogues really getting impatient? It seems to me that they’ve made enough out of me during the thirty years they’ve been getting such interest from me. They might make themselves obliging for once more.”

“But, papa, are you forgetting that it is with Monsieur Carvajan you have to deal now—with him alone? Or did Monsieur Malézeau tell you nothing of all this the last time he was here?”

The inventor struck his forehead like some one who has suddenly found in the depths of his mind a memory that had almost vanished.

“Ah, yes, my dear, I do remember something of the kind, but I was so interested in telling him about my furnace—with which I was very satisfied, although I had not then added the final improvement—and, once he had gone, I thought no more of this wretched business. Ah, so it’s Carvajan—yes, yes, of course! And what does he want?”

“That money you owe him, papa.”

“That is only right. Has he sent in his claim?”

“Not only sent it in, but obtained a warrant and gone through all the formalities which precede a seizure for debt.”

“A seizure?”

“Yes, papa, and an eviction also. Those are the only



two things he has left to do."

"But, my dear, it seems to me that there has been a great deal of negligence to let so many useless expenses be added to the original sum. Why was it not paid at once?"

"Ah, if only it could have been!" was all she said.

The marquis rubbed his velvet cap up and down upon his snowy head, and with a sudden uneasiness, asked:

"Then have we no money of which we can dispose?"

"No, papa. For the last year we have been living more simply than even the smallest tradespeople in the town. You have not noticed it, because you are indifferent to luxury. But it is thanks to this economy that we have been able to provide for the expenses of your invention. Try as we would we could not muster a thousand francs between us, and there is nothing owing us. The rent of the farm at Couvrechamps is paid, and we have received that of the farm at La Saucelle in advance. The Clairefont woods have been cut down almost to a tree. There is still the timber in the park which is said to be worth sixty thousand francs, but it would spoil the property to let that go."

The marquis did not seem to hear the last words.

"I thought of using those sixty thousand francs to take out my patent," he said, as though concluding a train of thought. "Just as I am on the point of obtaining a splendid result, and for a few miserable thousand francs! No, it is impossible! It would be too terrible a blow. Surely more money can be borrowed on the estate, and, if it must be, I will give up part of my rights in the patent. Yes, I will sacrifice Asia, Africa, and Australia; it means the loss of millions, but at least Europe and America would still be left me. And only for a few thousand francs!"

Antoinette, pale and cold, looked on at the useless struggle her father was waging against himself. It was in vain that he reduced the extent of his schemes; in vain, that, like a sailor in distress, he threw part of the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. It was too late—the vortex, in which he was caught, would swallow all.

"Alas, papa," she said firmly, "you must relinquish all your dreams; for they can never be realized. All is over, over—our last resources are exhausted. Believe me, it needs great courage for me to speak to you thus—perhaps if I could have made up my mind to do so sooner, we should not have reached a state of such utter ruin."

"My child!" interrupted the marquis reproachfully.



"Oh, do not doubt my affection or respect," replied Mademoiselle de Clairefont. "I am proving them to you better now by speaking to you thus than I have done hitherto by keeping silence. You had the right to dispose of the fortune that belonged to you in whatever way you liked, and not a member of the family will ever dream of discussing the use you have chosen to make of it."

"How blind you are!" cried her father, excitedly. "I wished—I wish still, to make you all rich! Can you not understand how it was? Have you no longer any confidence in me?"

"Yes papa. But the result has not been in accordance with your efforts, and not only have you now no money to perserve, but you have not even enough to acquit your debts."

"What do I care about my debts! I would double the sum I owe without fear or scruple. I am sure of success!"

"You have said that so often, papa."

"Come, come. The situation is not so desperate as you make out. I can understand your uneasiness—you others do not know what I have to expect from my new discovery. You have not, like me, the realization of your hopes within reach of your hand. Oh, you do not know the sacrifices of which an inventor is capable to save his work. There was Cellini who, seeing that the melting bronze would not be sufficient for his statue of Jupiter, cast vessels of gold and chased silver into the furnace with his own hands. I, my child, to insure the success of my invention—I would do anything! So strong is my faith in it that I would sell myself!"

Heated by his enthusiasm, the old man's face was transfigured. He clasped his daughter in his arms, and showered the tenderest epithets upon her. All that a capricious, coaxing child can do to entreat and wheedle its mother to obtain some favor, the old man attempted in his efforts to appease Antoinette. But he found her insensible to all his endearments.

"Aunt Isabelle has Saint-Maurice intact," said the marquis. "Could she not raise enough on it to relieve us this once?"

"She would refuse to do so — she has said so, so often. She looks upon Saint-Maurice as the last refuge we have to go to."

"What ingratitude!" exclaimed the marquis bitterly. "During the whole thirty years she has lived in my house have I ever distinguished mine from hers? All has



been in common in times of prosperity. But when misfortune comes, each one takes his own."

"No, papa, that is unjust. Aunt Isabelle has already paid away more than she can afford, and her disinterestedness is as great as her affection."

"But you, my pet, my dear little Toinon—you will not leave your father in such a hopeless plight? For I shall die if I do not succeed. You have money—you brother gave up his share to you, and you possess all your mother's fortune. Save the future of our house—rescue Clairefont from ruin! Listen—be my partner; I'll make you a millionaire. Do you hear? Why don't you answer me? Don't you understand? A millionaire, and in a year from now! Wouldn't that be fine? Isn't that worth risking something on—and not all your dowry, only a part of it."

And with eyes wild with eagerness, he stretched out his hands imploringly to Antoinette.

She quivered with grief. To what a depth of moral degradation had her father sunk! His passion, like a corroding poison, had finished by destroying in him the delicacy of the man, the dignity of the head of the family. The man on whom she was gazing was no longer anything but a monomaniac almost in his second childhood. He did not merit reproach; he could but inspire pity. Her dowry! He asked her for it, whining like a beggar imploring alms. He never dreamed, in his ignorance of all the privations that had been so cheerfully and heroically endured for his sake, that his daughter had already cast this very dowry into the gulf, sacrificing her marriage, her future and her happiness to spare him vexation. With swelling heart, Antoinette resigned herself to the necessity of telling a falsehood to spare the old man the grief of hearing that she had stripped herself of her fortune to help him.

"It is impossible for me to say yes to what you are asking, papa," she replied in a strange voice.

"What! you refuse me?" cried the stupefied marquis. "You will allow your old father to entreat you to no avail? You cannot have understood—or else I am making a mistake: you have not answered no. Then for a pitiful sum of money you are going to let us be ruined, you are going to allow our creditors to sell the home where we have lived, where you were born, where your mother died—"

She stood like marble, saying nothing, and opposing nothing but the passive strength of her inertia to the old



man's arguments and entreaties. He grew angry—it was the first time he had encountered resistance.

“No doubt you were all agreed—your aunt, your brother and you. Probably that explains their absence? They fled, while you, who were bolder, or harder-hearted, stayed behind to oppose me. You refuse me salvation; you not only rob me of fortune, but of fame. You are an unnatural daughter. Go! I will not tolerate your presence. Leave this room!”

He advanced towards her, his face distorted with senile rage, his lips trembling. She, unable to offer any further resistance, burst into tears, threw her arms around her father, covered him with tears and caresses, implored him, reasoned with him, addressing him alternately like a spoiled child and like a reasonable man.

“You do not know how unjust and how cruel you are. Oh, do not say anything more, do not send me away from you, or later on you will regret it bitterly. Do not accuse either my aunt or my brother—they, like me, would give their lives for you. We are the victims of a pitiless fate which pursues us relentlessly. Do not try to understand—but we are more unfortunate than you can ever dream. Do not seek to know, only be kind and do not be angry with your daughter who loves you, who venerates you, and whose only joy in this world is your affection!”

She threw herself on her knees, and by the very outburst of her grief reduced the old man to silence. But she did not succeed in convincing him. He was turning his project over and over in his obstinate mind, seeking some means by which he might realize it. And the more he thought, the firmer did the idea to send for Tondeur and sell him the timber in the park take possession of him. Standing before the window, apparently absorbed in a contemplation of the marvellous panorama which lay before him, he was admiring neither the beauty nor the variety of the landscape, but only reckoning up what he might make out of the great old trees. Independent of his patents, he dreamed of the construction of a model of his stove, exactly as it ought to be; and, carried away by his imagination, he could see in his mind's eye the brass stove finished and perfected, with a small steel plate on it, bearing the inscription, “Clairefont's Consumer.” And he smiled to himself, admiring his own talents in the form of his invention.

Now he was walking up and down his study, his hands in his pockets, humming a tune to himself. Several times



he passed close beside the arm-chair in which Antoinette was sitting; but he no longer seemed to trouble about her presence. At last he seated himself at his desk, and wrote down a few hurried notes, as if a sudden observation had just struck him; then he went to his laboratory, and the young girl heard him poking at the large furnace, and busying himself amongst his instruments and vessels.

Feeling sadder and more lonely amidst this clatter than if she had been in the deserted park, she slowly rose and left the room. She walked aimlessly along the vast corridors, went down a staircase, and started as she found herself at the door of her brother's room. She opened it and went in. The closed shutters made it dark, but Antoinette could see that everything was tidy and in its place. The guns stood in their rack; riding and hunting whips hung on the walls, and a sunbeam which had filtered through a hole in the shutter fell on a hunting-horn, making it shine and gleam like gold.

She could picture Robert half-mad with impatience and anxiety, fighting amidst the ambushes prepared by his traducers, giving way perhaps to the anger to which he was but too prone, and—who could tell?—aggravating his position by acts of violence on which, no doubt, his calumniators had reckoned. No one could go to visit him. And what a terrible trial, what constant torture it must be to this strong, muscular man, accustomed to the sweet, fresh air of woods and fields, and to the rough, healthy exercise of a country life, to be shut up between four walls, always being watched, and often tormented by questions to which he certainly could not reply. When would they see him again? Would he ever return? What was there not to fear from enemies who had been able to so far mislead justice as to cause an innocent man to be accused of another's crime?

She could imagine Aunt Isabelle too, lost in the large town, going fruitlessly backwards and forwards from the Palais de Justice to the prison, and hanging like a lost dog round the walls within which the boy she worshiped was dragging out a miserable existence. Poor old woman!

Antoinette made up her mind to write to her. She lighted a candle; for a sort of superstition forbade her to throw back the shutters, which she determined should remain closed until the owner of the room returned. Then she found her brother's paper, ink and pens, and relieved her wounded heart by pouring forth at once her troubles and her tears.

Unwilling for anyone in the neighborhood to learn



whither Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice had gone, she sent old Bernard to post her letter at the railway station. Then, feeling more composed, she went to her own room and passed the day in adding up accounts, looking over old papers, and reading the various summonses that had been sent to Clairefont.

When evening came, the father and daughter met again at the dinner table. The marquis was very cold to Antoinette. He sulked, and did not speak once all through the meal, but the young girl was almost ready to rejoice at this silence. Dessert over, the marquis rose and moved aimlessly about the vast room. For some minutes he stood thoughtful and undecided. He threw a sidelong glance at Antoinette as if he were going to speak to her; then, changing his mind with a petulant gesture, he said coldly: "Good night, my daughter," and went up to his laboratory without kissing her or touching her hand.

Mademoiselle de Clairefont bent her head as if the burden of this unjust rancor was heavier than she could bear. She turned to Fox, gave a low whistle, and going into the court-yard, began walking up and down upon the flag-stones, without thinking of taking the little path which ran along beside the flower-borders. The deer-hound gravely followed her, regulating his pace to that of his mistress.

Darkness was stealing silently over fields and woods. It was at this hour that Antoinette always used to go out for a short stroll every evening with Robert and her aunt before going to keep her father company. In the increasing darkness, the realization of the terrible position in which she was placed was forced cruelly upon her; and as she looked round in vain for the ones so dear to her and found herself alone, her despair overcame her, and unable to continue her walk, she dropped upon a stone seat, moaning: "Robert! Robert!"

A mournful, plaintive howl responded to her cry. The deer-hound, with eyes fixed on his mistress as if he knew her thoughts and shared her pain, seemed also to be bewailing the absent one. She spoke to him to pacify him, and then sat thinking, her hands on the dog's rough head. The clock of the village church struck eight o'clock, and rising with a shiver, Antoinette was about to go indoors again, when the little wicket-gate opened to admit Monsieur Malézeau.

"Thank heaven that I've found you alone, mademoiselle," he said. "I was so afraid that the marquis would be with you."



He stopped, unable to continue for his emotion. "My poor child! I pity you from the bottom of my heart—my poor child!"

Again he paused, apparently fearing that he had shown too much familiarity; and with a bow which testified the deepest respect, began to excuse himself.

"Forgive me for so openly expressing my deep regard for you, mademoiselle. I forgot myself; but I have known you since you were a baby, mademoiselle, and that must be my excuse."

"But there is no need for any," answered Antoinette. "Pray do not regret your manifestation of sympathy, dear Monsieur Malézeau. We do not receive very many just now, and I am exceedingly grateful to those who do not forsake us in our trouble, and who dare show us pity."

"Oh, mademoiselle, pray put every confidence in my devotion to you," stammered the good-hearted lawyer. "No power, however formidable it may be, shall hinder me from performing my duty towards your family, and I have come now to place myself entirely at the disposal of the marquis and yourself. If you only knew what pain it causes me to see you unhappy. Oh, pray do not cry—your tears upset me, and I want all my wits about me just now; for we have some very serious matters to consider."

Antoinette wiped away the tears which were coursing down her cheeks, and trying to regain her calmness:

"What is happening?" she asked. "Tell me all—I must be left in ignorance of nothing. And first of all, about my brother—"

"Oh, mademoiselle, by what unhappy chance did you not take him with you when you left the ball the evening before last! How imprudent it was even to go there!"

"But how were we to guess what was to happen?"

"Great heavens! You should have feared everything! This Carvajan;" and as he uttered the name, Malézeau instinctively lowered his voice as if he feared lest the night-breeze should carry his words to the house in the Rue du Marché—"this Carvajan is neither more or less than a tiger let loose. It is he who has stirred up everyone against your brother; it is he who has put the law on his track—why, if the arrest had not been made, it is impossible to say what might have happened; the people were on the verge of a riot. Oh, the *parquet* is doing its duty and is causing every inquiry to be made; in fact, several well-known bad characters have been actually taken up on suspicion, but nothing could be found against them, while with regard to this unhappy Robert—ah! the snare



has been well laid!"

"But can nothing be done to disarm Carvajan's anger?"

"A week ago I should have replied, 'Satisfy his ambition and his greed. Give him up the Great Marl-Pit with a good grace.' But would he have been contented with this substantial satisfaction? He hates your father and everyone connected with him. Unfortunately, you are entirely in his power, and you must not reckon on his generosity."

"Ah, let Clairefont perish; let the Great Marl-Pit go; let the wreck of our fortune be lost in the general ruin; but let my brother be given back to us!"

"Depend upon it, mademoiselle, that nothing that may bring about that result shall be left undone, mademoiselle. But unhappily, we have plenty of time for our efforts—"

"Then it will be a long while before we know?"

"Several weeks, I am sorry to say, mademoiselle. Justice is slow, mademoiselle."

"How shall we be able to keep my father in ignorance of what is happening?"

"It will be exceedingly difficult to do so."

"And yet, to tell him all would be to kill him. He could not bear so terrible a blow. A conversation I had with him this morning on money matters has thoroughly upset him—he has not yet got over it. What can you expect? He is not accustomed to worry and trouble. Until now, we have been so careful to keep everything of the sort to ourselves, and he has been able to devote himself with perfect freedom of mind to the labors which are his one delight. He has always had so much confidence in his discoveries. I always hoped—if by any chance he has indeed found what he has been seeking, would it not be wicked to deprive him of the result for which he has worked so hard."

"Don't let us think about that, just for the present, mademoiselle. The question is what you intend doing. Your property is on the eve of being seized for debt. Judgment has been given, and a delay has only been obtained, thanks to a series of oppositions which have only resulted in giving you time at a cost of great expense. Even now I could still find means to leave you in possession of your home a few days longer, but sooner or later the blow must fall, and these delays only exasperate Carvajan. On the other hand, if we allow the law to follow its course, we have the chance of seeing your brother's case disposed of, before the sale takes place. Freed



from all other cares, we can turn all our thoughts to his defence. We will ask some eminent Paris barrister to plead his cause, and we may be able to rescue him from the hands of your enemies. Then once he is out of danger we shall have nothing to consider except how to make the most out of the estate. To that end, we will send notices to all the lawyers in the department, and in the Capital to find a good purchaser for the chateau and the other property. We will communicate with the lime-burners at Senonches, pointing out the danger of competition and urging them to bid for the Great Marl-Pit to prevent a new proprietor underselling them. Carvajan, who has set his mind on having it, will not hesitate to bid against them, and by such a contest it will fetch a tremendous price. So that when it is at last bought, the marquis will have, after all his debts are paid, some two or three hundred thousand francs, which I will undertake to invest that he may live at Saint-Maurice in a way not totally unworthy of his rank. And that, my dear young lady, is the plan I have thought out and which I have come to-night to propose to you."

"Yes, that is what we must do," assented Antoinette; "it is what reason prompts. And after all the torment and sorrow I have passed through, I think I shall be able to leave this house almost without a regret—my suffering here has been so keen. I place myself in your hands, Monsieur Malézeau. See my father, reason with him, make him consent to leave the arrangement of his affairs to you and myself. And let us keep him in ignorance of all else until my brother has returned; then, when the danger is over, we can let him guess the anxious time we have passed through—the joy will be enough to make him forget it."

Malézeau looked at the girl with pitying admiration. Then he seized her hands and pressed them tightly.

"Yes, mademoiselle. You are quite right, mademoiselle—"

He broke off abruptly—another word, and he would have cried. When they reached the hail, Antoinette stopped.

"I am going to my own room," she said. "If you have anything to tell me before you leave, please send for me."

Antoinette shut herself up in her room and waited anxiously. She felt vaguely nervous; she distrusted her father's want of reasoning powers; she feared lest he should put some unlooked-for obstacles in the way, and so destroy the frail structure which had been erected to hide



the truth from him. For an hour she waited thus, straining her ears to catch every sound within the chateau; then she heard Malézeau go down stairs, saw him cross the court-yard and pass through the gate. A few minutes later, old Bernard knocked at her door, and gave her a note the attorney had hastily written before he left. There were only a few words—"Do not worry. The marquis will listen to reason. I shall come again to-morrow about mid-day."

That night Carvaján passed in restless agitation. The nearer the moment when all his hopes were to be realized, the more impatient did the banker become. Sure that the marquis could not escape his toils, he yet found himself giving way to fits of violent anxiety and irritation. Pascal had gone away the day before to Havre, where, so he said, he had some business of importance to attend to, and would not be back until the morrow. Fleury had come that evening to receive some final instructions about the important transaction which was about to take place, and, detained by the mayor, who talked with unwonted vivacity, had not been able to get away until the night was very far advanced. Then, when he was at last alone, Carvaján went up to his room, where he paced to and fro like a caged tiger, until the day had almost dawned.

During this night of unrest, he went once more all through the past, stimulating his hatred and fortifying his malice with his recollections. There was an exquisite delight in the thought that the marquis was at last at his mercy, and that he would be able to make him drain the cup of humiliation to the very dregs. To his enemy's moral torments, he meant to add the hardships of material difficulties. To make this proud nobleman undergo the horrors of a seizure for debt, to place him in the clutches of the bailiff and his men, to force him to look on while they did as they chose; to allow the heirlooms so precious to a family, the ancestral portraits, the various objects bequeathed by a father or a mother, to be subjected to the odious valuation which sullies relics so sacred as these; to introduce into the chateau, under shelter of the law, strangers who would have the right to lay their hands on everything, to open every door, to turn out every cupboard; to inflict upon the marquis the degrading torture of seeing an inventory taken of his dearest treasures and possessions—such was his project of revenge.

The following morning, he rose at his accustomed hour, opened his letters, received one or two visitors, and as he



heard nine o'clock strike, said to himself, "Papillon and Fleury are just starting for Clairefont." Even as the thought passed through his mind, there came a knock at the front door, and Tondeur's loud voice was heard asking:

"Is the master in? I must see him at once!"

Carvaján opened the door himself. He guessed that something unforeseen had happened, and felt a horrible, nervous dread. He glared at the timber-merchant as if he could have consumed him with the fire of his glance, and asked roughly:

"What is the matter?"

"The matter is that the marquis sent for me the very first thing this morning to propose the rummest thing out. I should never have believed it of him, by Jove!"

"Can't you speak out, you cursed idiot?" cried the mayor, exasperated by Tondeur's circumlocution. "Get to the fact! What did he want with you?"

"To sell me all the timber in the park, this very morning, for sixty thousand francs; and its worth a hundred thousand at the least, as sure as I'm a living sinner. But I said no. Then he came down to fifty thousand. Still I said no. He turned very white, and said, 'I must have forty thousand or I won't sell at all.' 'As you like, sir,' I replied. 'But I can do nothing without Monsieur Carvaján's consent. He only could authorize the trees to be cut down. *Fichtre!* If I ran on ahead like that, I should find myself in a nice hole, now everything is going to be seized.' Then the old man walked up and down a few minutes, mumbling to himself: 'Forty thousand francs and two months' grace would save me.' Then he asked me: 'Do you think Monsieur Carvaján would come and see me?' 'Can't say,' I answered, 'you'd better ask him!' 'Well, will you ask him for me?' he said. 'Oh, certainly, if you like, sir,' said I. And with that I cut off as fast as my legs would carry me, and reached here in a quarter of an hour."

"Let us go there!"

"Hallo!" said the timber-merchant. "Are you and the old savage going to meet face to face?"

"I must know what he wants. Papillon and Fleury must have started by now."

"I met them at the town-gate."

"Oh, well, we shall catch them up on the plateau."

"*Bouffre!*" exclaimed Tondeur. "I shall lose ten pounds of flesh before I've done to-day." He began to laugh, choked, and was seized with a fit of coughing



which made him turn purple.

Carvajan was already striding up the Rue du Marché. Again he was on his way to Clairefont, as he had been thirty years before. But under what different circumstances! Then he had run thither in the darkness, stumbling over the obstacles in his way, nearly mad with anguish. Now he walked firmly along a smooth, hard road in the broad daylight, proudly conscious of his power, and with the end at which he aimed well in view. As he walked, he could have cried aloud to the trees, the stones, and the ditches that he passed: "Do you recognize me? I am the miserable wretch you saw pass one evening, weeping and despairing, seeking the woman he loved—the poor friendless youth that could be ridiculed, insulted, and struck with impunity. Now I return as a conquerer, and to-day I can give back, if I please, insult for insult, and blow for blow. The wheel has turned in thirty years, has it not? I was beneath, now I am at the top—but I am the same! No," he thought, "those shady avenues, which to-morrow will be mine, shall not be laid low. I will not have my property injured; for soon I shall be living there myself, rejoicing in the fact of dwelling where my enemy once dwelt, and of being happy in his place."

They were now passing the white slopes of the Great Marl-Pit. The arid, chalky mound was an eyesore to Carvajan. "I will have a triple row of trees planted," he said to himself, "to hide the works." For he already regarded himself as the master to dispose of the land and make such alterations as he thought fit.

Before they reached the chateaugate, he and Tondeur caught up to Fleury, Papillon, and his man.

He opened the gate himself, and stepped the first within the court-yard. He moved forward, with eyes fixed on the ground, looking for the spot where he had fallen beneath the feet of the marquis' horses, his face scarred with a bleeding cut. He was not long in finding it—there it was, near a small clump of rose-trees bordered with mignonette. He paused for a moment, and trampled on it as if to efface some trace that still remained; then, still under the influence of this odious memory, he was about to enter the house, when, on the threshold of the door, he found himself face to face with Mademoiselle de Clairefont.

Neither uttered a word. Antoinette, without moving, glanced inquiringly at Fleury and Papillon, whose coming she had expected. Carvajan did not deign an explanation. His forehead was scowling and clouded. He



felt that he was in the presence of the one antagonist left him to combat in this house; that his hatred was fast turning into a desert and a wilderness. He shivered, and his triumphant joy forsook him—it seemed as if all was not yet over between these Clairefontes and himself. With a gesture, he commanded Tondeur to explain.

“The marquis, mademoiselle, asked me this morning to beg Monsieur Carvajan to give him a few moments’ conversation. And his worship has been good enough to come here with me.”

Carvajan with the marquis? All the danger of such a meeting appeared at once to Antoinette’s mind.

“Then I will take Monsieur Carvajan to my father’s room,” she said slowly. “And you, gentlemen, do what you have to do. Bernard, go with these gentlemen, and do as they bid you.”

She went upstairs, followed by Carvajan and Tondeur. The suffering she went through as she ascended those twenty steps, surpassed by far all that she had hitherto endured. She knew that her father regarded her with distrust, that she had lost her influence over him, and was no longer able to defend him from the blows that his worst enemies were preparing to strike him to the heart. She was in an agony of dread. She even thought of turning to Carvajan, and saying:

“What is it that you want? Name your conditions, but do not enter my father’s presence.”

The opening of the laboratory door put an end to her irresolution. The marquis had heard his enemy arrive, and was coming to meet him. He frowned when he saw his daughter; but Antoinette bravely prepared to enter the room. Then her father touched her arm, and said gently:

“Go, my child. I have to speak to these gentlemen on business. If I need you, I will send for you.”

“But, papa—” anxiously expostulated the girl.

Carvajan looked up; and with a sneer on his mouth, and with his yellow eyes fixed on Monsieur de Clairefont:

“If the marquis is under control,” he said, “I fail to understand why I am here.”

“Go, my child,” repeated the marquis, with a touch of impatience in his tone.

Then, fearing to displease her father by appearing to resist him, yet terrified at the thought of what was about to happen, Antoinette withdrew.

The inventor and the banker stood face to face. Tondeur retired discreetly to a corner, as though he took no



interest in whatever might be said or done. In his *role* of skilful ambassador, he had managed to introduce Carvajan into the house; now it was for his master to make the most of the situation.

"I asked Tondeur to bring you here, sir," began the marquis, "that we might settle for ourselves the monetary questions which rest between us. You have in your possession most of my bills and notes of hand. I am not going to discuss the reasons which have prompted you to collect them—I will go straight to the point. I believe I have found the means of acquitting myself of my debt, but to attain this result I must have two months' grace, and the sum of forty thousand francs. Under what conditions will you grant me the one and lend me the other."

The mayor stared at the marquis with stupefied amazement. He asked himself if it was really to him that such a request had been addressed. *Naiveté*, carried to such a degree as this, aroused his suspicions—he could not believe that his enemy could be so extraordinarily blind. To ask a service of him, to have apparently forgotten all his extortion, all his calumny, all his affronts, and lastly, his most recent and most terrible blow—the arrest of Robert, which the whole country attributed to him as the cause. This inexplicable forgiveness evidently concealed some trap from which, once he was caught in it, there would be no chance of escape. He gathered all his wits together and reflected.

The marquis saw the banker's amazement, and put it down to hesitation. "Do not fear to ask too much. I will agree to whatever you wish. I am so sure of success."

Success! This one word dissipated the shadows in which the tyrant of La Neuville was losing himself. He remembered the furnace of which he had heard so much. It was on the future of this invention that the marquis based his hopes of retrieving himself. It was by means of this extraordinary consumer that he proposed again to set going the work at the Great Marl-Pit, to pay his debts, to rebuild his fortune. The banker began to understand the situation. The marquis was subordinating all to his invention; to insure its success, he was forgetting the struggles of the past, the troubles of the present, overcoming his dislikes, and, in short, sacrificing the child of his flesh to the child of his brain.

"No doubt it is your furnace about which you are so anxious," Carvajan said, looking coldly at the marquis. "But I must remind you that I am here to receive money



and not to lend it—to terminate one transaction and not to commence another. Is that all you had to say to me?" Carvajan's cold, cutting voice put a sudden stop to the marquis' ecstasies.

"But under what pretext do you intend me to lend you money to try the merits of your invention? Do you think I am going to amuse myself by giving you ammunition to help you carry on war against myself? I can quite see what are your interests in all this—but where are mine? I am not a man to be contented with hollow words and humanitarian theories. Progress and industry are all very nice, but self first! There is nothing to prove to me that you will turn to advantage the capital you are asking of me, and I have enough money out already. You owe me nearly four hundred thousand francs, my dear sir, a hundred and sixty thousand of which are due to me this very morning. Are you in a position to pay me?"

"No, sir," the marquis whispered, lowering his head.

"Your servant then. And in future, pray remember not to trouble people simply to talk trash to them, and that when a man can't pay his debts he oughtn't to give himself the airs of a genius. Ha, ha! The consumer indeed! By the way, it belongs to me now, like everything else here. And if it is worth anything, I really don't see why I shouldn't work it myself—"

"You!"

"Yes, I, marquis. I think the moment has come when you may as well give up all attempt at diplomacy. You surely cannot hope to take in anyone so shrewd as I am? Although—and I say it with all due compliment to you—you have attempted to do so, though I never thought you would fight so hard. But now it's all up. You no longer preserve any illusions on the subject, I suppose? All that there is left for you to do is to pack up your odds and ends, and say good-bye to your country-house." The tyrant planted himself in front of Monsieur de Clairefont, and, his face lighted up with malicious glee, resumed:

"Thirty years ago you had me thrown out of your house. To-day it is my turn. A bailiff is below taking an inventory." He burst into an insulting laugh, and thrusting his hands into his pockets with insolent familiarity, walked up and down the room with the air of a master.

The marquis had listened to his harangue with stupefaction. The illusions he had still preserved fled in a second, as the clouds disperse before the breath of the



storm-wind. His reason returned to him ; he regained his judgment, and blushed at having lowered himself so far as to make proposals to Carvaján. He no longer saw in him the lender always ready for an advantageous investment—he recognized the bitter, determined enemy of his family.

“I was mistaken,” he said contemptuously. “I thought I still possessed enough to tempt your cupidity.”

“Oh, insolence,” returned the banker, coldly. “That is a luxury in which your means will not permit you to indulge, my dear sir. When a man’s in people’s debt he should try to pay them in other coin than abuse.”

“You are able to take advantage of my position, sir,” said the marquis bitterly. “I am at your mercy, and I ought not to be surprised at anything since my own children have been the first to forsake me. What consideration can I expect from a stranger, when my daughter closes her purse to me and my son leaves me to fight the battle alone? But let us put an end to this interview. There is nothing more to be said on either side.”

Carvaján made a gesture of surprise ; then his face lighted up with a diabolical delight.

“Excuse me,” he said. “I see you have fallen into an error, and that I must undeceive you. You are accusing your son and daughter wrongfully. No doubt you asked Mademoiselle de Clairefont to relieve you from your embarrassments and she refused, as you pretend? She had very good reasons for her refusal—the money you asked she gave long ago. So you complain of her ingratitude? Well, then, let me tell you that she has ruined herself for you, and secretly—imploring that you should not be told the use she had made of her fortune. And this is what you call closing her purse to you!”

The marquis did not utter a word, did not breathe one sigh. A wave of blood rushed to his head, and he turned first crimson, then livid. He only looked at Carvaján as might a victim at his murderer. He felt as though his heart were being wrung within his breast. He took a few steps ; then, forgetting that his tormentor was still present, mechanically seated himself in his arm-chair, and leaning his head against the back, moved it restlessly from side to side.

But the mayor followed him, taking an exquisite delight in the agony of his enemy, and overpowering and crushing him with the weight of his hatred.

“As for your son,” he went on, “if he is not with you



now, you may be sure it is through no want of inclination on his part. He was arrested yesterday, and taken to Rouen under the escort of two gendarmes."

The marquis leaped to his feet. He seized the banker; and with quivering lips and flaming eyes, forced him back against one of the stone pillars with irresistible force, crying:

"Scoundrel! You lie! Confess it was a lie, or I will strangle you!"

The two men struggled together thus for the space of a few seconds, but the marquis' temporary strength soon forsook him, and bruised and shaken, he fell fainting into the arms of Tondeur, who had come to his aid.

"Curse him for an old rascal!" cried the mayor, angrily. "He wants to try on his old games again. Tondeur, I call you to witness that he has offered violence to a municipal authority. By heaven, I'll have him before the court for it!"

"Come, Monsieur Carvajan, calm yourself," said Tondeur, who felt sorry for the old marquis. "It was a heavy blow you dealt him, and he was not master of himself at first."

The old man's eyes unclosed again, and with a face distorted with grief, he repeated brokenly:

"Committed for trial? My son—my Robert? Can it be possible? What has he done?"

Carvajan drew nearer, until his crimson face was almost touching the marquis'; and then replied:

"He has followed in his father's footsteps. He too has abducted a girl, only this one tried to defend herself, and so he strangled her. That's what he has done."

Monsieur de Clairefont rose, and addressing his enemy in a tone of prayer:

"He cannot be guilty," he said, "it is impossible, sir; he is my son. You too have a child—think of what my suffering must be. Poor boy, innocent, I know, of the crime of which he is accused! I am at your mercy—I will do anything you wish—I acknowledge my faults—but I implore you, for I feel you could do all for my poor Robert; be indulgent, save him! Give him back to me again!"

Carvajan listened with arms folded, perfectly impassive.

"Ah? Just now you were insulting me—now you are using entreaty. Coward and hypocrite! Am I a friend that I should do you a service?"

"Monsieur Carvajan, I regret intensely any injury I



have done you."

"Do you think you can efface the outrage with a few words of that sort? I still bear its traces on my cheek, although so many years have passed. See, look at that spot, at the foot of the steps. It was there that by your orders your horses overthrew me, your lackeys struck me."

"Then come down thither with me," said the marquis eagerly. "If you wish, I will go to that very place, and there on my knees ask mercy for my son."

For a moment the tyrant stood still and dumb before his vanquished, weeping, supplicating enemy. He saw the tears running down Honoré's cheeks. "He is crushed—he is at my feet," he thought. "The dream of my life has become a reality. I triumph, and I am happy." Again he told himself: "I am happy;" but he knew he was not. The bitterness was still in his heart, his thirst for vengeance was not yet quenched. He turned on his heel and moved away.

"I care little for your *amendes honorables*," he replied. "It would always be the same thing over and over again with you and your son, and now I have you, I will not let you go. It is you who commenced the fight—do not be astonished if I pursue it to the death. Rank, fortune, respect—you had all and I nothing. Soon, the balance between us will be equal."

As he listened to these hard words, the marquis saw that all hope was gone.

"If Heaven is just, you will be punished through your son," he cried. "Yes, since you have no pity for mine, yours will show no regard for you. Scoundrel! You are the parent of an honest man. He it is who will chastise you!"

These words, uttered by the marquis with the fire of madness, made Carvaján shudder with fear and rage.

"Why do you say that to me?" he cried. He saw the old man walking aimlessly to and fro, with haggard eyes and wild gesticulation. "I believe he is going mad!" he whispered to Tondeur.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the marquis. "My enemies themselves will avenge me. Yes, the son is an honorable man—he has already left his father's house once—he will loathe what he will see being done around him. Get out of here, you monster!" he exclaimed, suddenly turning on Carvaján. "Your work is done. You have robbed me of my fortune; you have robbed me of my honor. There is but my model left, and that you shall



not have!"

He ran to his table, tore up his designs, and trampled them underfoot. Then, seizing a heavy hammer, he hurried to the stove; and, laughing horribly all the time, tried to break it. Carvaján, in his exasperation, stepped forward to stop him. But the old man turned round with hair bristling and his mouth foaming.

"Stay where you are, or I'll kill you!" he cried.

"*Sacrédié!* I'm not afraid of you!" returned the banker.

And he was on the point of rushing forward to save the stove from the destructive rage of the inventor, when the door was thrown open, and Mademoiselle de Clairefont appeared. She had heard from below the marquis' high, excited tones.

"Father!" she cried.

She sprang to him, took the hammer from him; and clasping him in her arms, asked in terror:

"Father, what is it?"

Honoré passed his hand over his forehead.

"Send away that man," he moaned. "He makes me ill—he is killing me."

Antoinette turned to Carvaján, and said quietly:

"My father asks you to be good enough to leave him, sir."

And as the banker hesitated, and remained where he was, a flash shot from Mademoiselle de Clairefont's eyes, and pointing to the door, she said one word:

"Go!"

The mayor bowed in silence, and, followed by Tondeur, who tried to make himself as small as he could, went out of the room.

Then Antoinette seated her father in the large arm-chair, and kneeling beside him, chafed his icy hands, wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and, as he still remained inert and his eyes did not uncloze:

"Father," she said, "it is I. Speak to me, papa. You frighten me."

Honoré breathed a sigh of pain, moved, and, opening his eyes, recognized Antoinette. Then the tears welled up again, and with an effort folding his hands as if in prayer:

"Oh, my child, my angel!" he said. "I have accused you and misjudged you. Forgive me, forgive—"

He fell backwards and lost consciousness. At the same moment a rapid step was heard upon the stairs, and Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil came in.

"Antoinette," he cried, advancing with outstretched



hands.

"I was expecting you," she said simply.

"Good Heavens! Have I come too late?"

"No, for alas! we have still much suffering to undergo." And pointing to the marquis lying lifeless: "Help me to carry my father to his room."

Carefully and tenderly they raised the old man, who whimpered like an infant, in their arms, and sadly and slowly bore their burden down the stone staircase.

## CHAPTER IX.

The hours which followed were hours of terrible anxiety. Croix-Mesnil did everything within his power, but he could not reassure Antoinette about her father's condition.

Watching with the baron at her father's bedside, Antoinette passed the most agonizing moments of her existence. Seated by the table, on which stood a lamp which left most of the room in darkness, she listened to the labored breathing of the sick man and the meaningless, incoherent words which fell from his lips; and though her eyes were fixed on the staunch friend who had hurried to her side at the first whisper of misfortune, neither of them spoke.

Sore at heart and physically exhausted, the girl was haunted by the gloomiest presentiments. She could not even concentrate her thoughts upon the invalid who was lying dully moaning, a prey to violent delirium; for they fled to her brother, who was in still greater, though less immediate peril. What a Calvary for the poor girl to climb, and how heavy the cross she had to bear! Her nerves were all unstrung and she felt weak and helpless. Her head was heavy and burning, and she longed to cry; for she knew that if her tears could but flow freely she would be refreshed and calmed. But her eyes were dry and sunk beneath their lids, as if drawn inwards by the intensity of her thoughts.

At ten o'clock, old Bernard came in on tiptoe to ask if they would not come down to supper. Antoinette shook her head, though Croix-Mesnil begged her to go downstairs with him, reminding her that she had eaten nothing since morning, and that she must keep up her strength if she would nurse her father. At last he made her promise to take some soup, but she would not consent to leave the sick-room.

It was through the papers that Croix-Mesnil had first



heard about it. A brother officer had lent him the *Courrier de l'Eure*, and with horrified surprise he had read the history of the crime and learned the arrest of the pretended murderer. He had at once asked for twenty-four hours' leave, and had hastened off to Clairefont. As he traveled, the other papers of the department had soon enlightened him as to which way popular opinion flowed, and he found it was already divided into two currents — the one being in favor of Robert, the other against him; and unfortunately the second was far stronger than the first. The question, thanks to the skilful instigations of Carvajan's partisans, was turned into one of political importance. The radical papers teemed with anathemas hurled at "the sanguinary sports of these last representatives of the feudal system, who thought they could still dispose, according to their abominable caprice, of the honor and the lives of their inferiors." Chassevent, designated as "a venerable old man, and an honest laborer," was described as weeping for his daughter, the support of his old age; and the whole wound up with a strongly-worded appeal to the firmness of the judges and the severity of the jury; for so deadly a crime merited an exemplary punishment.

Seated beside one another, he very sad, she very pale, they talked together in the dim light of the lamp which was turned down as though they were watching beside a death-bed. Every now and then they ceased their conversation to listen to the old man who, in his delirium, uttered dire threats which he alternated with a lamentable laugh. And these pitiful wanderings, muttered between clenched teeth, brought them back with a shudder to the terrible reality.

"Always Carvajan! It is he who has brought this accusation against Robert, is it not?" asked Croix-Mesnil.

"So Monsieur Malézeau thinks. And how can we doubt it after what passed the evening before? He has avenged himself in an awful way for the insult my brother offered him. Alas, we have greatly contributed to our misfortunes ourselves, and we have been very imprudent in many ways. We are right in blaming our enemies; but, to be just, we ought to commence by blaming ourselves."

Then, like a protest against this frankness and humility, the hissing voice of the marquis was heard in the shadow of the recess in which stood his bed, repeating:

"Carvajan! The scoundrel! Fortune, honor—all, except my invention!"

About two o'clock in the morning, she went to her



father's side and watched him attentively. His face was less contorted, his breathing more regular, and he seemed calmer. A flood of joy swept over her, and suddenly the tears, that the most bitter pain had not been able to wring from her, burst forth, now that her heart was glowing with a ray of hope. She clasped her hands together, and fell on her knees; and Croix-Mesnil heard her praying God to spare her father to her. He tried to raise her, to comfort her; but she said:

"Leave me. It does me good to cry. I was choking."

"See," she added, pointing to the marquis, "I think he is better—he has ceased to rave. Oh, if we can only save him! I was thinking just now how more than cruel it would be if Robert never saw him again, and if the idea should take possession of him that it was grief for him that had caused his father's death."

"You will save him," replied the baron, with emotion, "and you will see father and son again united. The wicked do not always triumph, and, in spite of what people say, there is a Divinity."

"I believe so, firmly," answered Antoinette, simply. For a few minutes they remained at the bedside, looking at the old man; then Mademoiselle de Clairefont told her companion she wished to watch alone.

"If I want any help, I promise to send for you," she added; and after some little resistance, Croix-Mesnil obeyed her.

The chateau was wrapped in silence, and everything seemed to sleep. Outside in the night could be heard the melancholy wail of an owl, but his ill-omened cry did not trouble the young girl—it only sounded to her like an echo of her own sorrow. She lay back in an easy-chair, her eyes fixed on an angle of the mantel-piece, which gleamed in the light, allowing her imagination to carry her far away.

Gradually there stole over her a sensation of being buoyed up, as if she were floating in space, rocked by gentle winds—no longer conscious of fatigue or sorrow, she was being slowly wafted through a soft and boundless atmosphere. Her bosom heaved more regularly—she had fallen asleep.

This slumber lasted a full hour; then it seemed to her as if a voice were summoning her from the depth of her repose. She started to her feet, and hurried to the bedside. Her father was supporting himself upon his elbow, and looking round with vacant, startled eyes. She gently spoke to him, and he took her hand and pressed it, as if



to let her know that he recognized her; then articulating the words with difficulty, he said:

"You must see this young man, my child. He is honest—it is he who will save your brother."

She thought the words were but the outcome of a feverish hallucination, of some delirious idea. She kissed the old man to soothe him; and giving way to his fancy, as one does with a child, she answered:

"Yes, papa, yes. Lie down and rest. All will be well."

He nodded his white head, raised his eyes, which for a moment lost their vacant look; and in a tone which sounded prophetic to his daughter, he repeated:

"It is this young man who will save us. He is honest. You must see him, my child."

He tried to turn towards her, but the muscles of his neck pained him at the attempt; his features contracted, and again the look of delirium came over his face.

"He was there just now," he murmured, "he was imploring you—I recognized him at once—there, close beside the curtains—"

"That was Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil, papa."

"No, no," replied the sick man, with increasing excitement. "I know what I am saying—I am in my right senses. It was Pascal Carvajan, and it is he alone who can save your brother. Promise me that you will see him. I shall have no rest until you promise."

"Go to sleep then, papa. I do promise you."

The marquis' features relaxed. He lay back with an expression of peacefulness upon his face, muttering some words which his daughter could not catch; then in a few minutes he was quietly sleeping.

Mademoiselle de Clairefont sat thinking. The image of Pascal, so suddenly recalled to her memory, was before her eyes. By what strange intuition had the old man been led to designate Pascal as Robert's possible deliverer? Had some supernatural power shown him the young man in the wanderings of his dreams? He pretended to recognize him, and he had never seen him. What soft voice had whispered his name in his ear? How came it that at this decisive hour he rose on his bed of suffering with an authority which was irresistible to give so bold a counsel? Surely it was her—Antoinette's—duty to follow that advice. She had promised to do so, and in the inmost recess of her heart a vague hope was already taking root. Perhaps it *was* here that safety was to be found. Much might be gained from the father through



the son, and if Carvajan's hatred, appeased by the capitulation of his enemies, should fade away into indifference—!

At this thought a violent excitement took possession of the young girl. What? She could hesitate and deliberate when the happy result was in her hands? Her lips curved in a bitter smile; for at the price of what a humiliation was this result to be obtained! She would have to go and see Pascal, to reason with, to entreat him. After she had so distinctly given him to understand that he was less than nothing to her, that a Carvajan had nothing but contempt to expect from a Clairefont, she would have to present herself as a suppliant, weeping for mercy.

Well, she would do it, and find joy in the deed. What sacrifice would be too great to insure her brother's deliverance? Besides, did she not owe some expiation? She was partly responsible for their common misfortune; for she had been haughty and disdainful; and so she prepared to offer her pride as a tribute to their enemy. She would go to Carvajan himself, should there be need; she would confront the tyrant, she would ask his pardon for having dismissed him from her home, she would give him the joy of a triumph complete in every detail.

Daylight found her thus disposed. Her mind was made up, and she would not flinch. The only point on which she was not yet decided was how to obtain an interview with Pascal, but she resolved to leave that to chance.

About seven o'clock, Croix-Mesnil rejoined her. The marquis had fallen into a heavy torpor, and had ceased speaking, though his breathing was still heavy and labored. Giving way to the baron's entreaties, Antoinette consented to leave the invalid in his care, and went to her own room, where she bathed her hands and face in cold water, and then lay down for a short time. At nine o'clock, as she was finishing dressing, old Bernard knocked gently at her door, and told her that Doctor Margueron had arrived, and with him Monsieur Malézeau.

Antoinette found them at her father's bedside. By the doctor's orders, all the windows had been thrown open; and the marquis seemed refreshed and revived by the air and light with which the room was flooded. His eyes were open, and he showed faint symptoms of consciousness. The fever was not so high, but his left side was slightly paralyzed. The doctor, who had made a previous visit, declared himself much better satisfied, and explained to Malézeau that his patient had had an access of delirium which was now passing away.



"He must not be fatigued in any way," he said; "and above all, don't let him talk. I will write my prescription downstairs."

When he was on the terrace, with only Mademoiselle de Clairefont and the lawyer, the good doctor could not refrain from speaking of Robert; for the previous evening, in the hurry of attending to the marquis, he had not been able to find a favorable opportunity of saying what a deep impression the confronting of the count with the body of the murdered girl had made upon him.

"I assure you, mademoiselle, that when I saw him kneel down so simply beside the dead girl and pray, my conscience rebelled, and I said to myself: 'Either this young man is the most heartless scoundrel alive, or else he is innocent.'"

"Oh, he had nothing to do with the crime," said Malézeau, warmly. "He is frankness itself, and he told the truth. A Clairefont does not lie, doctor."

"He has some terrible and bitter enemies," resumed Margueron. "My evidence has been twisted and distorted, and reported to La Neuville as if it were dead against the count. But, at the trial, I shall say what I think, and if the jury has not been tampered with—"

"But is such a thing possible?" asked Antoinette, horror-stricken at the idea.

"It has been known to happen," replied Malézeau.

Mademoiselle de Clairefont allowed the doctor to take his leave, but kept the lawyer with her. She was determined to begin her work: to permit Carvajan to go on influencing popular opinion, was perhaps to sign her brother's death-warrant. She laid her hand on Malézeau's arm, signed to him to be seated on a bench near the terrace-steps, and asked him point-blank:

"How can I arrange an interview with the son of Monsieur Carvajan?"

The question took Malézeau's breath away. He could have been prepared for any step but this; and he asked himself if Antoinette, driven to desperation, had not determined to do something of which she might repent later on. But he saw that she was calm and collected, and he skilfully proceeded to question her. She told him quite frankly what had happened the night before, and owned that the desire her father had expressed seemed to her like a command from Heaven. As he listened, Malézeau felt a strange emotion getting the better of him. It might really be the wisest plan to appeal to Pascal's better feelings, and to gain over Carvajan through his interests.



Perhaps they would have to come to some arrangement by which the estate would be given over to the mayor of La Neuville without being put up to auction, but anything would be preferable to the horrors of a criminal trial. In his heart the lawyer felt sure that all the evidence against Robert had been instigated by Fleury, Tondeur and their confederates, and he was not mistaken. It only needed a word from Carvajan for the affair to assume a totally different aspect; and instead of being tried at the assizes, it could at once be dismissed on the plea of there not being sufficient evidence against the prisoner.

"Well, mademoiselle," said Malézeau, waking up from his reflections, "it is an attempt worth making, mademoiselle. Young Carvajan arrived at the railway station this morning; so he is in La Neuville. But I don't suppose you are very anxious to find yourself face to face with his father, so we must go very carefully to work. If you will trust yourself in my hands, mademoiselle —"

"My only hope is in you."

"Well, then, I will take you to my wife, and while you are with her, I will go and reconnoitre, and clear the way for your interview."

After an absence of twenty-four hours which had greatly puzzled his father, Pascal had, as Malézeau said, returned that very morning. Questioned as to the reason of his journey, he had replied laconically that he had gone to Havre to see a client; but as he answered, a blush rose to his face; for he had not told sufficient falsehoods to be an adept in the telling. His journey to Havre had been in reality limited to a visit to Rouen, where he knew he should find one of his brother-students who had been recently appointed Deputy-Procureur-Général, and who received him with the stiff, emphatic amiability which is typical of the legal profession. For half-an-hour his conversation flowed freely as he dwelt on the tremendous amount of work he was called upon to perform, and on the cares and responsibilities of his position—all which he expressed in long, wordy, rounded phrases. But when Pascal tried to introduce the topic of the Clairefont case, the *substitut* became at once cold and suspicious, hardly uttering more than one or two syllables at a time.

"Serious case—very serious case. Evidence difficult to obtain. Accused cunning and very close,"

And as his visitor continued to press him with questions:

"But, by the way, you come from La Neuville. You ought to know more about it than I do." And instead of



giving information, he began to question.

After an hour's visit, Pascal went away feeling very anxious, and convinced that Robert was to have no leniency shown him; and not wishing to return home until the following day for fear of arousing his father's suspicions, he went back to his hotel, where he passed a wretched evening.

Now, shut in the banker's office, he was trying to kill time by working, but his rebellious thoughts refused to stay in the small, dark room and bore him far away from the notes and memoranda spread out before him. Unable to remain still, he went to the window and looked out.

Just then there came an impatient knock at the door, a sound of voices in the hall; and then Maître Malézeau entered the office looking as though something very extraordinary were about to happen. Never before had his eyes blinked so furiously behind his gold-rimmed spectacles.

"Has your father really driven off by the road to Lisors?" he asked mysteriously. "You are quite alone? All right then—I have a lady with me who would like to speak to you."

At these words, all the blood in Pascal's body seemed to rush to his heart; his legs shook under him; and the room seemed to be turning round and round.

"Who is it?" he asked in dry, unnatural tones, feeling sure that the answer would be—"Mademoiselle de Clairefont."

But Malézeau did not waste time by stopping to reply. He simply opened the door, and, standing aside to leave a clear path, said:

"Come in, mademoiselle."

There on the threshold of his father's gloomy office, Pascal found himself face to face with Antoinette. She was dressed all in black, and her face was covered by a veil; but this she abruptly removed, and he saw that she looked pale and ill, and that her eyes were reddened with sleeplessness and tears. He was far more agitated than she was, and it was only mechanically that he drew forward a chair for her. She seated herself; then cast an imploring glance at Malézeau, which the attorney answered by bowing and leaving the room.

They were alone together, and this moment, for which, but the day before, Pascal would have given the rest of his life, was now a source of intolerable embarrassment to him. His face was burning, and he had a sensation as of red-hot needles at the root of each hair on his head.



"If I keep silent, I shall seem absurd. If I speak, I run the risk of saying something idiotic which will make her hate me," he thought. Then he raised his eyes to Antoinette, and in them she read so much entreaty that she understood it was for her to command, and for him to submit. She smiled sadly, and, in a voice which thrilled Pascal to his very soul, commenced:

"I come to you, sir, as a suppliant. And how should I dare take such a step, if I had not the memory of our first meeting to encourage me? Fate, you see, knew what she was doing, when she threw you in my path."

She was brave enough to glance at him coquettishly. She was prepared to make every effort to gain the victory. And he, feeling the charm of her manner, still listened when she had ceased to speak. Then it was she who reminded him of the lane where they had met for the first time. All that had followed had no existence—she had voluntarily blotted it out. All that remained for him and for her was the short walk on a bright summer morning amidst the light, the verdure and the flowers. If he had uttered the words which rose to his lips, he would have said to her: "I love you." But he would not speak them. She was unhappy; she had come to him frankly and confidingly; she was there alone with him, protected but by his honor.

"I will never tell her how I worship her," he thought; "but I will prove it to her by devoting my life to her." He approached her, and with the respect he might have testified to a saint, he said, in the deep, musical tones which went straight to the heart of even Carvajan himself:

"I know what has brought you here, mademoiselle, and I fancy I must have had a presentiment that I should see you to-day; for yesterday I went to Rouen to make inquiries about your brother."

She uttered a little cry of pleased surprise, and a pink flush spread over her cheeks as she found herself so exactly and so quickly understood.

"He was in good health and quite calm, so I was assured," went on Pascal. "As for the case itself, the prosecution, so far, has been very reserved."

"Perhaps nothing has been yet decided," she answered, clasping her hands together. "Perhaps there is yet time— Ah, sir, if you would only unite your efforts to ours! I feel that I may count on you, that your reason is just, your heart generous. I implore you, speak to Monsieur Carvajan on our behalf!"

Pascal turned pale at this earnest prayer which likened



his father to a tormentor whose cruelty his victims longed to disarm. Antoinette was afraid she had offended him.

"Forgive me, if I have displeased you," she said pleadingly, "but the request I have to make is so difficult to put into words. I do not want to utter one syllable which you might think a disparagement of your father, and yet I must make you understand that we are asking mercy. We are forced to throw ourselves on his kindness, and on yours. Any conditions that may be imposed will seem easy to us if we can obtain a little indulgence for poor Robert—*any* condition, sir, you hear? And it is because we thought that your intercession would have more weight than that of anyone else that I have addressed myself to you."

Then it was only of her brother that she had thought. In her secret soul, no inclination had urged her to seek out Pascal. Her heart was closed to all which was not Robert; and for love of him alone had she conquered her pride and stooped to entreat. Pascal resolutely put from him all vain hopes of love; he forced his thoughts into order; he calmed the tumult of his blood.

"If you knew how sorely we are being tried!" continued Antoinette. "After an interview with Monsieur Carvajan—oh! I am not blaming him for it—my father was taken ill, and his condition is causing us the greatest anxiety. All came upon me at once, you see; and I do not know which way to turn not to see some fresh disaster threatening me. I am alone at Clairefont. And had it not been for a faithful friend who hurried to my aid—"

A suspicion flashed through Pascal's mind. His face changed, his hands involuntarily clinched.

"Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil," he muttered, under his breath.

"Yes, Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil. Poor fellow! Cares and sorrows will be his only reward for the affection he has shown us."

It was said so gently, so tenderly, and yet so indifferently, that Pascal became himself again.

"Pray believe that I am ready to attempt anything to satisfy your demands, mademoiselle," he assured her. "But I can only promise for myself, and it is for my father you want me to answer."

Antoinette fancied that the one she wished to conquer was escaping her.

"Do you not possess unlimited influence over him?" she said eagerly. "Have I not seen the place you occupy



in his heart? Oh, I beseech you, be our friend, take up our cause! We have no hope left us but in you. Robert—there is nothing we care for besides Robert. We are ready to give up all but him.”

“Your lands, your chateau, the rest of your fortune—that is what you mean?” asked Pascal bitterly.

She made no reply. It was the second time she had made the offer; for was not that what she had come to do? Malézeau had so plainly told her that that was what would have most weight with the banker. The Great Marl-Pit was the aim of his efforts, the dream of his ambition, the booty his allies kept constantly in sight. Mademoiselle de Clairefont felt that she was advancing on to dangerous ground; but surely she ought, in this supreme treaty of capitulation, to specify the conditions. She did not dare say anything more as she watched Pascal walking to and fro with clouded face. Suddenly he paused, passed his hand over his eyes, and with a sigh that sounded like a sob, seated himself by the window, apparently completely forgetting that he was not alone. Antoinette was seized with pity for his suffering. She went to him, and in tones that made him quiver:

“Have I pained you? Please, please forgive me.”

He looked at her with sombre eyes.

“Pained me?” he said. “What! Is a Carvajan pained when he is offered money?” He broke off with a bitter laugh, while Antoinette stood silent and confused.

“Why should I be so sensitive!” he resumed. “Does not everyone know that profit is the one rule of the house we are in? The arguments you are using are sensible and logical. After all, it is only a matter of business. You do not know me, and you do not know whether I have a conscience or a heart. What reason have you to suspect that I suffer terribly through what goes on around me? Who could tell you of my repugnance and my sorrow? Were you to have an intuition that I could be proud and disinterested? Do not believe it. I am a Carvajan, that is to say, a man who is avaricious and greedy. The bargain you propose to me is a good one; there is no doubt but that I shall accept it. Always call my eagerness for gain into question. That is the most prominent trait in my character and the one about which you can never be mistaken!”

His features were all contracted and distorted by the violence of his feelings. But Mademoiselle de Clairefont only shook her head.



"And that is just what I do not believe," she said, very quietly. "I am sure that you are good and kind-hearted, and that with you tears and prayers would help us a hundred times more than the most brilliant promises. And so, in exchange for what you are going to do for us, I shall only offer you my sincere gratitude, and from you I shall ask for no more binding promise than that you will make by laying your hand in mine—will you do so?"

The little hand, which had brought down the whip with so cutting a swish through the air on the Couvre-champs road, was now held out open and inviting. To touch those slender, taper fingers was to make himself a slave. To devote himself to Antoinette was to declare himself Carvajan's opponent. But so Pascal decided to do at once. Had he not been ready so to do ever since his return to La Neuville?

He clung to no hope of being loved some day—he cherished no illusion as to the sentiments to which Antoinette was yielding. He saw that she was constrained by a hard necessity to do violence to her pride—almost to her modesty. He pitied her and tried to shorten her trial. He took the hand she held out, with tender respect, barely pressed it in his own; then said:

"Let me reassure you, mademoiselle. No harm shall reach you, either through your affections or your fortune. That I promise you upon my honor."

In the shock of her joy, Antoinette could not find one word to say in reply, and the promise sounded so solemn in the silence of Carvajan's gloomy office, that Pascal himself was awed.

"But remember, sir," she said at last, "that I do not ask you to do anything in our interest that could possibly injure your own."

"Nothing could do me more harm," he replied, "than to associate myself, even indirectly, with a work of which my conscience disapproves."

Mademoiselle de Clairefont nodded her head in approbation, and a strange light gleamed in her eyes. When she next spoke, her voice sounded more silky, more engaging—almost like the tones of affection.

"All the same," she returned, "I shall look upon your generous promise as one that only binds you to us to a limit that you alone must fix."

Then, as if she feared lest this last expression of her pride should wound the young man again, she added:

"But whatever else may be the result of this interview, be sure that it has taught me to regard you with lasting



esteem and the sincerest gratitude."

Again she stretched out her hand to him, and, this time, he did not fear to take it and press it, as if the contact of the soft, warm flesh attached him to Antoinette still more completely.

The door opened, Maître Malézeau came forward, and Mademoiselle de Clairefont had reached the other end of the Rue du Marché before Pascal left the doorstep and gave up trying to see her still.

He turned slowly into the house again, went upstairs and shut himself up in his room, where he stayed until seven o'clock, at which hour Carvajan returned from Lisor's, famished after his seven hours' drive. The banker went straight into the dining room, shouting for dinner to be served, and there Pascal joined him. The mayor was in a very good humor, and entered into an animated account of the affair he had been looking into that day and which promised to turn out very profitably.

"See, my boy, it's a distillery on the banks of the Lieure, which forms an excellent motive power. The good people who started it are not rich enough to go through with it, and they have nearly reached the end of their tether—it wants a great deal of capital to carry on an affair of that kind. Well, these innocents have annual contracts with the Northern growers to supply them with beet-roots, and they sell the refuse pulp to the farmers in the neighborhood instead of using it to feed some cows themselves. Why they could cover the original cost of the beet-root by what they could get by the milk! But it wanted Carvajan to show them that. Dumontier and I are going to lend them a hundred and fifty thousand francs on a first mortgage. Lisors is not very far off, and every now and then I shall run over to see how they are doing. There, I've made a good dinner, but I had done a good day's work before it. And you, my dear fellow, what have you been doing with yourself?"

Pascal's heart beat fast. Should he tell his father boldly what had happened, or should he prepare him for such news by carefully leading up to it? He dared not tell him yet, so he replied evasively:

"I have stayed in all day."

Carvajan pricked up his ears. He noticed a strange ring in his son's voice; and on looking at him attentively, he found he looked slightly embarrassed.

"Well, let us go and have a cigar in my office," he said, rising from the table.

They went into the large, dark room which was only



lighted by a lamp placed on the banker's desk ; and, with a thrill of delight, Pascal detected a faint perfume in the atmosphere—the subtle trace which Antoinette had left of her visit to the enemy's abode. Carvajan's sense of smell was as acute as that of a savage. He snuffed the air vigorously, and he did not utter a word, but strode up and down the room as he was in the habit of doing. The suspicions he had formed about his son seemed to be receiving confirmation, and he felt vaguely uneasy. Could Pascal be conniving with the Clairefonds ? he wondered. But if so, how and by whom were they connected with each other ? Absorbed in the study of this problem, he was pacing up and down between the window and the desk, when suddenly he caught sight of a piece of black net on the old mahogany console-table which finished off the pier-glass by the window. Mechanically he went and looked at it ; then recognizing in it a woman's veil, seized it with an exclamation.

“Who left this here ?” he cried. “Who has been here in my absence ? *Sacrédié !* I thought I noticed an odor that ought not to be in a bachelor's room when I came in !” He thrust the veil into Pascal's face. “You ought to know all about it, you who have not been out all day,” he went on. “This does not belong to any of the La Neuville ladies—thank heaven, they don't hide their faces. Has—” But the supposition was so improbable that he dared not put it into words. He stood in suspense, twisting the piece of black gauze, which was impregnated with a delicate odor of violets, in his outstretched hands, while his mouth worked with rage.

Pascal closed his eyes to the sight of his father, who looked simply horrible ; and summoning all his resolution to his aid :

“Do not puzzle yourself about it,” he said. “Mlle de Clairefont has been here.”

“Ha, ha !” sneered Carvajan. “They must be in a fix up on the hill there, for the haughty Antoinette to have made up her mind to come down here. And did you see her ?”

“Yes, father.”

“What did she want ?”

“To intercede for her family with you.”

“Intercede ? Indeed ! She's become very humble all of a sudden !” Then, with sternness in voice and look he asked : “And why did you not tell me of it as soon as I came in ?”

“Because I hoped I might, by gaining a little time, dispose you to regard the matter in a favorable light.”



The two men gazed at each other in silence. Then Carvajan burst out:

"Oh, you hoped that, did you? Indeed! Do you think I am a ball to go whither I am rolled? Am I a man to change my mind for the sake of a caprice, to give up my projects for a little whimpering and whining? I suppose the beauty tried to get round you with wheedling phrases, and to soften you with tearful looks? Ah, she knows how to ply her woman's trade, and she can be as honeyed as anyone. She gave us a specimen, the evening of the fete when her stuck-up *fiancé* refused to dance opposite you! You should beware of such people. As far as words are concerned, they promise you heaven and earth, but when it comes to actions, you may go to the devil! Oh, I know them—and well too, I've seen so much of them. What they're best up in is the art of lying. The girl coaxed and wheedled you enough, I've no doubt, while she was here; but before she got to the end of the street she was laughing at you. You may take my word for that!" Carvajan had resumed his walk up and down the room. He was thinking deeply, and his face was very grave. Suddenly he stopped, and glancing at his son:

"But she did something else besides sigh, I suppose? She probably talked a little. What did she say? What proposition did she make? When people ask for peace, they know it can only be granted on certain conditions. Let us leave the sentimental side of the question, and consider the practical. First of all, what does she want?"

"For you to save her brother and spare her father."

"In other words, that I shall prove beyond a doubt that young Clairefont is spotless and innocent as a dove, and that, holding the old one, as I do, in the hollow of my hand, I let him go free and unhurt. Quite enough, upon my word! And what does she offer me in exchange? Her everlasting gratitude, I suppose?"

"Mademoiselle de Clairefont made no conditions."

"And who then is to fix them, *sacrédié*?" cried Carvajan, his tanned face turning a sombre red.

"Yourself, father," replied Pascal, coldly. "Are you not the master?"

Carvajan leaned his back against the mantel-piece.

"I am the master, that's true," he said with mock frankness. "But the position is somewhat embarrassing, and two heads are better than one. What would you do, if you were I?"

"I have always let you see what I should do, father.



Ever since I have been back I have been advising and entreating you to be reconciled. When I returned, the Clairefont's position was not nearly so serious as it is now; and it was solely in your own interest that I spoke to you. I hoped to see you relinquish a hostility calculated to lower you in the opinion of many. I wanted you to occupy yourself with thoughts and projects worthy of the high position to which you had attained. You were the strongest—it was for you to display generosity. That was the language I used when those you considered your enemies were still able to offer some resistance. But what ought I to say to you, now that they are vanquished and in despair; now that they ask for mercy? I no longer offer you advice—it is an entreaty that I address to you. Be kind—do not strike those who are down. Turn aside your anger from these Clairefont's who have almost ceased to exist. Do not destroy the son, whose real and only crime is the name he bears, and leave the father to die in peace on his curtailed and impoverished estate."

"The son!" cried Carvaján angrily. "Do you forget how he insulted you before the whole town? The father! Do you not know that only yesterday morning he tried to kill me? They are down, you say? Then what would they do if they were up? You do not know them—they are scoundrelly rogues!" Then cooling down again, he thrust his hands into his pockets, adding: "In short, my boy, it's all very pretty, what you are saying; but they owe me nearly four hundred thousand francs."

"The estate is worth double."

"It would be a bad lookout for me if it wasn't!"

"Father," resumed Pascal, his voice shaking with the emotion he felt, "do not deprive me of all hope of persuading you. Do this one thing for me, and I shall be grateful to you so long as I live. Ask of me what you will in exchange—I consent to anything in advance—I will be your servant; I will make your interest mine; I will do all to further your ambition. My time, my talents—all shall be yours. But, in the name of all you hold most sacred, do not refuse me what I ask."

Carvaján crossed over to his son, and, with scathing irony in his tones, said:

"Why what reward have you been promised, if you succeed?"

"Father!" exclaimed the younger man.

"Are you my son, or the Clairefont's business manager?"

"Is it not always the desire of a son to see his father's



name honored and respected?"

"Honor! Respect! Those words sound well from your lips. Come, sir, say out boldly what you mean—have the courage of your treachery. Do you think I have yet to discover the presence of an enemy in my own house? You imagine you can deceive me, but you have yet something to learn before you will do that. Fool, to be carried away by a woman's words, and to try and dupe your father! Speak, plead, sigh for her, if you like—you'll see how she'll reward you. Ah, I wanted to know exactly how things stood, and I have found out now. You have been billing and cooing with the beautiful Antoinette, and she has made you her slave. Go to her; she'll teach you the meaning of honor and respect!"

"Father!"

"Dare to tell me she has not bewitched you! Dare to deny that you love her!"

Pascal, who had hitherto bent beneath his father's anger, drew himself up, and raised a face glowing with passion:

"Then, yes, I do love her! And my love will be the curse of my life, since I find myself placed between you, whom I find implacable, and her, whom I would have every man hold sacred. Have pity on me! All the blows you are going to deal, will fall on my heart. It was fate which brought it all about. I did not seek out Mademoiselle de Clairefont—I met her without even knowing who she was; and when I was able to reflect, it was too late. But I will give you my word never to see her again, if you will spare her. I do not know either her father or her brother. I am thinking of no one but her—only her! You cannot hate her—she has never done you any harm. Father, you too have loved and suffered. In the name of the past, be generous to-day—do not make your son as unhappy as you have been yourself."

"You are wrong to call up the past," returned Carvajan; "for the memory of it makes me pitiless. Give up your love—it is not quite so old as my hatred! As long as I can remember, hatred has glowed within my heart. It is that which has given me the energy to attain the position I now hold. Everything I have done in life has been to insure its triumph; and now, just as my goal is reached, you come and ask me—merely from a caprice, and because you fancy yourself in love—to give up the reward to which I have so long and so eagerly looked forward. What utter absurdity! You are nothing but a short-sighted, timid child. You do not even know how



to guide your own steps. Let me manage your affairs at the same time as my own, and I will get more for you than you can even wish. You almost accuse me of being a bad father—I will prove my affection. Do you want this girl you love? Then I will give her to you. You shall see how pliable and gentle she will be. Her pride! Ha, ha! I have an infallible means of bringing down young ladies who think too much of themselves. Trust to me. Follow my advice; don't meddle; only look on, and your princess is yours!"

"Never!" cried Pascal, furiously. "I should die of shame before her."

"Ah?" said Carvaján. "I think I have displayed a good deal of patience so far, but you are beginning to exasperate me. I will put up with your whim, but only on the condition that it doesn't last much longer. There is no power on earth that can make me say no, when I have made up my mind to say yes! Now, thirty years ago, I swore to myself to turn the marquis out of his chateau, and to establish myself there in his stead."

"And I, father, I swore to myself just now that you should not do so!"

"Oh, indeed, you swore that, did you?" said Carvaján, with horrible calmness. "Well, then, you will learn to your cost that you should never take a rash oath. Within a fortnight, do you hear, the Clairefont estate will be put up at auction, and the marquis will be out on the highway a beggar."

"No, father, he will not; for to-morrow you will be paid."

"You don't say so," sneered the banker. "And with whose money?"

"With mine!"

If the house had fallen about his ears, it would not have produced so startling an effect upon the banker.

"Have you thought well over what you have just said?" he stammered.

"Yes, father, as have you of what you intend to do."

"You will thwart my schemes?"

"I will hesitate at nothing to prevent a base robbery!"

"Whence have you drawn the audacity to speak to me in such a way?"

"From the horror with which your deeds inspire me."


At these words, Carvaján strode forward, threatening and terrible. He seemed to grow taller, and his face was convulsed with a savage fury. As he stood, his fingers, hooked like talons, his face, black and scowling, his yel-



low eyes gleaming like gold, he might have been taken for the Evil Spirit himself.

"Ah, is that so?" he cried. "And you threaten and insult me! Well, then, those whom you wish to defend, I will pitilessly pursue. So they thought they were doing a fine thing by drawing you over to their side? They hoped that I should pause to avoid fighting you? They'll see what I am capable of when I am braved! What a noble protector they have got hold of, to be sure! You are very bold to dare to stand up against your father; but I've mastered stronger men than you, my boy, before now, and you'll feel the weight of Carvajan's fist before you've done! Idiot, to believe all that these Clairefonds have promised you! Can't you see that they are hypocrites; that they are only making a cat's-paw of you; that this girl is but a bait? No, you take it all in! And she does not stint her favors—ask her officer if she does. But she can only disdain you—you, a man of no birth, your father's son, a fellow who hasn't a *de* before his name. When you've pulled the chestnuts out of the fire for them, they'll turn you off like a lackey? Why won't you see things in the right light? Come, Pascal, my boy, I can have no object in deceiving you—I am frank and sincere. You are running your neck into a noose. You will have failed in your duties as a son; you will have thrown aside your father; and in the end you will find yourself left in the lurch. Are you listening to me—eh? Why don't you answer me? You stand there with your eyes fixed—do you hear what I say? Come, say something—you haven't lost your tongue. Promise me to reflect—don't go giving away thousands and thousands of francs like that. *Sacrédié!* Money's difficult enough to make, and it wouldn't take them long to squander yours. Pascal—Pascal—"

He went to the young man, put his arms round him, pressed him to his breast, caressed him, speaking affectionately to him, varying his intonations, eager to gain him over. But he found him cold and deaf and dumb, encased in an impenetrable armor of determination. Then, foaming with rage, Carvajan cried:

"Out of here, you vagabond! I turn you out of my house! A scoundrel who sells his father—who murders his parents! Yes, you are killing me! If I don't see these Clairefonds in the gutter, I shall die—I have lived but for the hour when they would lie conquered and crushed, beneath my heel! And you deprive me of this happiness for which I have waited so long! 



Go, I say, or I shall do you some injury!"

"Father!" entreated Pascal.

"I forbid you to call me father! How do I know that I am your father to begin with? I doubt it when I see your behavior."

The young man stood dumb with horror at this fury which recoiled before no threat, no blasphemy. Then, with a gesture of despair, he turned towards the door. His father reached it as soon as he did, and ready to make one last effort:

"Pascal," he said; and his eyes stared wildly though his brain was perfectly clear, "at least let us meet each other half-way. Do not pay, and I will leave them at peace."

"No, father, I have no longer any confidence in you. You would deceive me."

Carvajan's gray hair stood upright on his head. He would have struck his son—his arm fell nerveless to his side. He tried to shout, to insult him; but he could only stammer:

"If your mother were here, she would curse you!"

"No, father, I am sure she would not," answered the young man, proudly raising his head.

And, leaving the old man, mad with helpless rage, he went out of the room.

## CHAPTER X.

The next day the inhabitants of La Neuville learned, with almost equal surprise and satisfaction, that the quarrel between Clairefont and Carvajan had taken a fresh turn, thanks to the rupture between the mayor and his son. Fleury, Tondeur and Dumontier had been seen hastening, early that morning, to the Rue du Marché; and after a long time spent in the banker's house, they had come out excitedly, talking and gesticulating, while Pascal had temporarily installed himself at the house of Maître Malézeau, who boldly burned his ships, and declared himself on the side of the Clairefont family.

The Dumontiers had told the Leglorieux that Pascal, infatuated with Antoinette de Clairefont, had dared to set up his will against his father's; and this confidence, embellished by the Leglorieux with some skilful adornments of their own, was being turned into a statement that was simply slanderous. The current report was, that Pascal had been surprised with the young lady from the



chateau, and had been at once turned out of the house by his angry and indignant father. And, it was added, it had been necessary to almost tear Carvaján from the hands of his son, who was trying to strangle him.

Another account, quite as inexact, but in Pascal's favor, had been circulated by the partisans of the chateau. Ah, they said, the mayor was in a pretty fix, and he would probably be turned out of office; for, through others, he had lent money at the rate of fifty per cent. to that poor innocent old marquis. And besides that, he knew the true murderer of Rose Chassevent, and had sent him out of the country to keep him out of the hands of the law and to ruin more surely the unfortunate Robert, who was "as innocent as a new-born babe, my friends." Pascal had discovered all; and in his indignation, he had tried to make his father come to terms with the marquis and denounce the man who was really guilty. But Carvaján had refused; and then his son had left him, saying that he would defend Robert de Clairefont, at his trial, himself, and also find means to prevent the sale of the estate.

Never had human heart been gnawed by more awful anger. Since his son's departure, the tyrant of La Neuville had neither eaten nor slept. He passed day and night furiously pacing up and down his office, finding a vent for the violence with which he was overflowing in this ceaseless movement. Malézeau had conveyed the intelligence to him that his account was settled, and had placed to his credit the capital, with the interest and sums incurred in various law expenses, which the Marquis de Clairefont had owed him.

And so it was finished; and the patient work of thirty years was annihilated in a moment. The clerk who brought the attorney's letter had fled, terrified at the explosion of one of those vulgar fits of passion in which coarse words fell from the lips of Gatelier's ex-shopman like filth overflowing a gutter. The servant, hearing a terrible noise in her master's office, was afraid lest he should have a fit of apoplexy, and had ventured slightly to open the door. She saw Carvaján haggard and foaming, striking at the furniture with clenched fists while he swore the most horrible oaths. He caught sight of the maid, and rushed upon her, yelling:

"Do you dare to spy upon me? Go, you idiot, or I shall kill you!"

Trembling like a leaf, the girl had taken refuge in the kitchen, and, that very evening, related the incident to the gossips in the market-place.



“Holy Virgin! what a man! He was half mad! The way he ground his teeth! I got away just as fast as I could. There, I wouldn’t stand in his enemies’ shoes for anything.”

But in spite of these prognostics, the occupants of Clairefont were comparatively tranquil. There was an improvement in the state of the marquis; and, strong in the assurances she had received from Pascal, hope had again sprung up in Antoinette’s breast. She had frankly told Croix-Mesnil what she had done, and her former *fiancé* was much troubled by this unlooked-for interference from Carvajan’s son. By an intuition peculiar to lovers, he suspected a mystery and guessed a danger. What sovereign influence, save the young girl’s beauty, could have made an ally of this enemy of yesterday? Therefore the joy the baron ought to have felt was poisoned by a secret bitterness; but he was brave enough to conceal it; and in his generous heart, the desire of seeing his friends triumph almost stifled the jealousy with which he already regarded Pascal.

At last — on the day following the rupture between Carvajan and his son — Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice, urged homewards by the anxiety the news of her brother-in-law’s illness caused her, returned from Rouen, worn and thin with care, but with a redder face than ever. Malézeau brought the old maid from the station in his pony-chaise, so that they had plenty of time to talk going up the hill to Clairefont; and when Aunt Isabelle saw the printed bills Papillon had stuck on the stone pillars of the principal entrance, she jumped down, and, tearing off the degrading placards, ran excitedly into the chateau clutching them in her hands.

“Here’s something to make my curl-papers of!” she cried, when she reached the drawing-room, waving the papers triumphantly over her head.

They had to soothe and quiet her. The excitement of the journey, the pleasure of finding herself once more at Clairefont, the news given her by Malézeau, had made her beside herself. Then, when it was pointed out to her that, though improved, the situation was by no means satisfactory, she fell from the height of joy to the deepest despair. She spoke of Robert, whom she had not been able to see, gave a vivid description of the horrible prison in which he was incarcerated, and wound up by bursting into tears. The lawyer had to assure her that she would shortly have certain news of her nephew through Pascal. As soon as he was formally committed for trial, the de-



fender could communicate with his client, and Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice would herself be admitted to see him. It seemed a long time to wait; but there was the hope of obtaining a good result in the end; for the name of Carvajan alone was worth ten times more to Robert than the every-day skill of a Paris barrister.

Pascal's talents had already been proved. People still remembered his success when he was only a beginner; and now improved by study, with the experience of years, heated by the zeal with which he undertook to sustain the count's cause, he would be a formidable—one hardly dared say a victorious—opponent for the public minister.

"I always thought that this Pascal was an honest lad," cried Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice in her loud voice. "Ah! if he will only give me back my poor Robert, he can ask what he likes in return. Yes, whatever it may be, I will give it to him."

A faint smile passed over Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil's face.

"Don't tell us that too often, mademoiselle. Who knows to what his ambition might aspire?"

"It could not aspire too high after such a service," replied Aunt Isabelle, warmly. "The honor and the liberty of a Clairefont are worth all we possess. Are they not, Antoinette?"

"Yes, aunt," replied the young girl, coldly.

She rose to put an end to the conversation, and taking Malézeau on to the terrace, asked him many questions as to the happy means by which he had managed to stop Carvajan's persecution.

The lawyer asserted that he had found a man ready to lend the money under very advantageous conditions. Industrial and commercial undertakings being speculative, capitalists sought safe investments. By entirely paying off the old debt, they had been enabled to give the new creditor a mortgage on the property as security; and as long as they could pay an interest of five per cent. they would henceforth be left in peace. As soon as the trial was over, the Great Marl-Pit could be set going again, with an engineer who understood his work as a manager. And, if the marquis would listen to reason, in the course of a few years he would be able to pay off his debt; but he absolutely must give up being a man of genius, and content himself with being merely the head of his family. Antoinette listened to Maître Malézeau with much emotion; and the tears stood in her eyes as she pressed his hand. They walked for a moment in silence; then she



said:

"I do not know how to express my gratitude. All the good fortune that has come to us, we owe to you. Your faithful friendship first dared to stand up against our persecutor, and, thanks to it, we have obtained Monsieur Pascal's providential assistance. It is your friendship also which is putting an end to the financial embarrassments which added so cruelly to the horrors of our position. Every day of my life I shall pray for you."

Malézeau's eyes twinkled and blinked behind his spectacles, the glasses of which became dim and blurred, like window-panes in a rain.

"Mademoiselle—you overwhelm me. Mademoiselle, you are thanking me too much for the little I have done, mademoiselle. It is to another all the praise should be given, mademoiselle."

Then fearing to have said too much, he cast a terrified glance at his companion, and said no more.

"As for my father," resumed Mademoiselle de Clairefont, "I am sorry to say I am sure he will never have the health nor the desire to take up his former occupations again. It seems as though the spring of his mind has been broken by these violent shocks. He is regaining his strength; he talks; he listens; he remembers; but he has neither energy nor will. He is a gentle, smiling child, as you will find; but Dr. Margueron assures us that he may live a long while thus."

They continued their walk, Antoinette absently tracing lines with the end of her sunshade on the path. She longed to speak of Pascal to Malézeau, and to hear a clearer account of what had passed at the Rue du Marché after her interview with the young man. She was uneasy, agitated; and for the first time in her life her conscience troubled her. Was it not she who had lighted the torch of war between the father and son? Was it not by speculating on Pascal's generous sentiments that she had constrained him to break with Carvajan? True, there was an inward voice which said: "What does it matter to you? Poor lamb, leave these two wolves to devour each other. They are of the same race, the same blood—is not this combat between your enemies the just revenge of all you have had to suffer?"

But Antoinette knew well that Pascal was not an enemy. He was her slave; he belonged to her unreservedly; and it was to obey her, to please her, for her sake only, that he had deserted his father's faction, and was preparing to fight against it. She was therefore respon-



sible for what had happened, and all the harm which might come to Pascal, all the injury he might have to suffer, would come to him through her. And from that very fact, there was a tacit bond between her and the young man, and the thought hurt her pride.

"Papa has already asked to see Monsieur Pascal," she said; "when will he come?"

"I cannot tell you, mademoiselle. The lad has a strange nature, mademoiselle; he is very retiring—Madame Malézeau has not yet succeeded in persuading him to take his meals with us as long as he remains at our house. He is afraid of giving any trouble, and he likes to be alone. Unless I am very much mistaken, you will not see him until there is urgent need for him to present himself at the chateau."

Antoinette breathed a sigh of relief. She had feared he would encroach; and she found on the contrary that she would probably have to go in search of her defender. His reserve pleased her, and she felt more free.

Shut up in the rooms Malézeau had placed at his disposal, Pascal had passed the last two days in a state of utter dejection. He hated life and all its infamy, and, giving way to his gloomy misanthropy, he left his shutters closed, and spent his time smoking, stretched on a couch in the semi-obscurity. His mind was filled with bitter thoughts. Surely he had been marked at his birth with a fatal sign which doomed him to misfortune. His whole past was full of sorrow, his present was showering cruel trials upon him, and his future held no hope. What was he doing in the world? Execrated and cursed by his father, tolerated by the woman he loved as a mercenary, to be treated with contempt when the victory was won, would it not be better to vanish?

What was the anguish of the last hour compared to the torture he was enduring? After the short transit from life to death would come calm, sweet repose—sleep with one delicious dream in which would shine Antoinette's maidenly face. There he would see only affectionate smiles upon her lips; for all hatred would have died away, and she would be able to know his heart. She would see how tenderly he had adored her; and, appeased at last, she would accept him as her eternal betrothed.

He summoned up his courage, shook off his inaction, and quietly commenced to make inquiries, concerning the facts which were going to place the Count de Clairefont in the dock. At the very beginning, he stumbled upon a similar expedition which was being conducted by his



father's emissaries in the endeavor to gather proofs of guilt, where he, Pascal, was searching for signs of innocence. The forces of attack and of defence were already taking their precautions, tracing the lines of their blockade, and deciding where to lay their mines. These presages of warfare restored Pascal entirely to himself. He drooped and pined in inactivity—face to face with difficulty and danger, all his strength returned to him. After having to battle and counterfoil the craft of South Americans, he was surely capable of overcoming these cunning natives of Normandy.

He was soon convinced that the prosecution had not confined itself to collecting the evidence which could so easily be raised against Robert, but had conscientiously followed other and various clues. Several persons had been suspected and examined. A strolling tinker, whose presence had been noticed at Couvrechamps the night of the 25th, had got off, thanks to an indisputable *alibi*. Roussot, who had passed part of the evening with Rose, had been questioned; but no information could be drawn from the shepherd. He had presented himself, looking thin and worn, and with his face distorted in a horrible way, which gave an expression at once laughing and stupid to his features. It was only by means of threats that he could be made to speak at all; and then he had uttered inarticulate yells, which sounded more like a wild beast than a human being. The farmer from La Saucelle, who happened to be present at the examination, interceded on behalf of the idiot, giving him the best of characters.

“With the exception of not speaking or hearing very well, which is not always a thing to be regretted,” he said, with the sly mischief of a peasant, “he is a good servant. He understands all about sheep, and he never goes to the wine-shop. He was very fond of Rose, and so he had need be; for she half brought him up; she was always kind to him; and he used to follow her like a dog. Rather than do her any harm, he would have defended her to the death—that he would! Besides, he came home about two o’clock that night, or it may have been a quarter past. My wife heard him open the door of the sheep-fold, and she said to me: ‘Hark! There’s Roussot coming in.’”

At this, Roussot began to tremble, his face turned livid, he gave a plaintive howl, like that of a dog baying at the moon; and throwing his arms above his head, he fell into terrible convulsions.



"There, you see," said the farmer. "It would kill him if he were worried much—he isn't quite right in his head. But he'd never hurt a fly, you may take my word for it."

How obtain a deposition from a being not in his right mind, and even if it were obtained, how much dependence was there to be placed on it? And so the shepherd was left in peace.

As he walked by the Great Marl-Pit to learn the exact nature of the surrounding land, Pascal met Roussot, and was struck by the change in his appearance. The shepherd's eyes were dull and lustreless, his mouth contorted. He who used to be so alert and quick to resent a stranger's presence now remained seated or lying on the heath, no longer greeting passers-by with his growls and gambols. Pascal even went up to him, and he made no movement—the black dog vainly barked to warn his master—the latter did not stir. He seemed to be dreaming wide awake, his eyes were fixed as if on some vision, and the tears ran down his cheeks. Pascal uttered the name of Rose. The idiot quivered, but was not aroused from his strange ecstasy. What a difference between this dejected torpor and the lively ardor which had animated him the first time Pascal saw him!

It was the day following his—Pascal's—return to La Neuville, on that exquisite summer morning when he had first stood in the presence of the marquis' daughter. Roussot and Rose were laughing then as they played together amongst the reeds on the edge of the pond, and the girl was almost as strong as the shepherd.

How free and careless was Pascal then, as he followed his beautiful companion along the Couvrechamps road! The air was filled with sweet scents, the bright green of the trees almost blinded his eyes, the earth rebounded elastically beneath his tread. It was one of those moments when the body is surrounded by a purer atmosphere, when the mind feels more active and more powerful, when the whole being seems to dilate and expand like a plant under the warm kisses of the sun. Another instant, and what a change! It had only needed for Antoinette to utter her name and for him to reply with his, and the sky had seemed to grow dark, the bright landscape gray and dull, and the earth had shuddered as under an icy wind. The young man had felt his heart grow heavy in his breast. It seemed as though this picture, first so sunny, then so gloomy, was to represent his own history, commenced with joy only to be concluded in



sorrow.

He left Roussot, and went down the hill to Pourtois' inn as he had done the day he had met Antoinette, and pushed open the tavern door. As before, the room was in cool darkness; and it was with difficulty that the young man distinguished its occupants. Fleury and Tondeur were no longer there playing dominoes; but Chassevent was seated at the table with a look of besotted stupidity on his face, drinking brandy, while dried-up little Madame Pourtois was silently knitting behind her counter. The vagabond did not stir, but the inn-keeper's wife turned pale, and hurried forward to meet Pascal.

"Ah, Monsieur Carvajan, is it really you? What may I serve you?"

"Nothing. Is not your husband in?"

"You wished to speak to him?" asked the woman, suspiciously. "Poor fellow, he has been very ill the last few days. Monsieur Margueron says he has had 'a shock to the system.' He is in bed and not allowed to speak or to see anyone—it is since the accident, you know. A man who lives the quietest life, and suddenly to be obliged to carry home a corpse! It was a dreadful shock to him."

Chassevent, who had been leaning forward over his glass, now seemed to revive.

"Is it true, Monsieur Carvajan," he asked, gloomily, "that you are going to defend the murderer?"

"It is quite true," answered Pascal.

"What grudge do you bear to poor folk to try and make them more miserable than they are? Now my sweet little girl is dead, how am I to make enough to live on at my age? She fed me, she mended my clothes, she nursed me if I was ill—ah, she was indeed a dear, pretty, good child. When I lost her, I lost all. And you want to prevent me getting some money and that scaramouch having his head cut off as well? Is it worthy of a man like you who are so clever?"

Pascal tried to exasperate the old scoundrel a little, hoping to make him commit some imprudence.

"If Monsieur de Clairefont is guilty of the crime, he will be condemned," he said, sternly. "But I am sure he is innocent, and no one knows it better than you do, unless it is Pourtois, your companion."

"Innocent!" shouted Chassevent. "Only let Pourtois say so! Curse him, only let him say that he didn't see the same as I did, and may the devil seize me if I don't—"



Here Madame Pourtois skilfully interposed.

"Have you come here to torment honest people who have their living to get, sir?" she said, tartly, to Pascal. "Our house is certainly open to anyone who likes to come in; but it's for them to get food and drink in, not to bandy malicious words. The way you have left your father's house is little enough to your credit, without coming here to talk nonsense to us."

The inn-keeper's wife was growing very excited; her face wore an expression of abominable wickedness; her little snake-like eyes gleamed viciously; and her thin lips grimaced as if she longed to bite. She was going to continue her speech, when a door at the other end of the room opened, and Fleury appeared.

"Ah, Monsieur Carvajan!" he cried. "I was just coming to see you."

"It seems that your husband's door is not closed to everyone," said Pascal, meaningly, to Madame Pourtois, who resumed her seat behind the counter in silence.

"Come," said the magistrate's clerk. And without taking any further notice of Madame Pourtois or the old poacher, he drew Pascal outside.

They happened to stand on the very spot where Fleury had pointed to the terrace of Clairefont, and said, triumphantly: "It is all over with them now!" He remembered the circumstance, and bending down his cloudy face, began:

"Is a reconciliation impossible? Are we to be enemies? Oh, if you but knew the harm you are doing your father! He has aged ten years. You would be startled at the ravages grief has made in his appearance. And to think that you are the cause —"

"I?" exclaimed Pascal, exasperated by such hypocrisy. "I? You dare to accuse me?"

He drew a long breath as though to ease his palpitating heart; then, with a sudden outburst:

"Do you suppose that I have forgotten your detestable confidences? How foul a mind did you think I had to dare to make them to me? Yes, with almost incredible cynicism you unveiled your projects; you explained your combinations; you showed me every nook and crevice of your snares; and because I said nothing, you thought that I approved your plans, and perhaps that I should even help to carry them out! Was it not indeed an inviting scheme? This admirable enterprise was directed against the fortune of a poor old man incapable of defending himself—the sole aim was to despoil and strip him. And all



the machinery of loans in the names of men who have no existence, of bills renewed and discounted, of compound interest, was set in motion; and I looked on at these abominations, already pondering how I could prevent you achieving your end. I said nothing; for I was choking with disgust, and I was caught between the horror with which your deeds inspired me and the shame of having to repudiate them. What I suffered, you are, not able to understand. I wept the bitterest tears that have ever flowed from the eyes of man. I wished to go away, to disappear, to place a great distance between me and this iniquity; and I was going, but by your infamy you have forced me to remain. The fortune was not enough for you—you must have also the honor of this unfortunate family! You have caught the son in one of your pitfalls, you have accused him, given him up, crushed him to the earth. And I—the spectator of your manœuvres—I have been brought to see that if I went away and forsook him, I should become your accomplice. My conscience revolted at the idea; and sickened by such ignominy, I have been urged to enter into combat with him whose name I bear, as the only way of putting a stop to it. Yes, it is *Carvajan versus Carvajan*, as they say at the Palais!”

Fleury had made no attempt to stem the tide of fiery words; but when Pascal paused, he said with a sneer:

“I have been a fool—I ought to have held my tongue. But I don’t mind betting that if Mademoiselle Antoinette were less handsome, you would be less indignant.”

Pascal turned pale. He caught the other by the arm, and shook him roughly.

“I forbid you to utter Mademoiselle de Clairefont’s name before me,” he cried. “The first use I shall make of the independence I have regained will be to chastise rogues like you, if they permit themselves to indulge in familiarities I think loathsome! You had better remember that, and also warn your comrades.”

“There, there, don’t get so angry,” said Fleury, in honeyed tones. “I am a peaceful man—I did not mean to vex you—my intention is always to conciliate. Come, will you leave your father to his grief without taking a step towards him? Granted that he may have been hasty; but didn’t you exasperate him? Cannot things be arranged?”

Pascal tried to be calm; he wanted to know what cowardly meanness they dared to hope from him.

“What do you mean by that?”

Fleury wildly scratched his unkempt head.



"You are the master of the situation," he replied,—"and therefore you should be moderate. Give up the Great Marl-Pit to us."

"Restore Robert de Clairefont to liberty."

"You know very well that it is impossible to do so now."

"Yes, it is always easier to do harm than to make reparation for it."

"Will you not consent to see Monsieur Carvajan again?"

"What is the use?"

"You might come to some arrangement."

"Never, on the terms that you propose."

"Will you present the sad spectacle of a son fighting against his father?"

"By preventing him from committing acts that I disapprove, I am defending the interests of his honor against himself."

"Is that all you will say?"

"My father has heard all I had to say to him. Now there is nothing left for me but to act."

"You had better take care."

"Oh, I know what I have to expect from your disappointed cupidity. You will not recoil before anything—you will not hesitate to slander and to bribe. But for all that the truth will come to light, and I shall neglect no means by which it may be brought to light."

With a gesture of anger, Fleury turned and faced Pascal.

"Is it to be peace or war? For the last time I hold out my hand to you."

Pascal stared at the clerk with withering contempt, and with a shrug of the shoulders replied:

"Why do you? I have nothing to put in it."

And without another word, without once turning to look back, he went on his way.

However, Fleury's threats were not empty ones. Every attempt was made to corrupt the witnesses with the most shameless audacity. The Tubœufs, who lived at Couvre-champs, received several visits from Tondeur, who inquired about their needs and questioned them closely as to their meeting with Robert and Rose as they were returning from the fair. It was to the interest of Tubœuf, who was a working mason, to be on good terms with Tondeur, and after the timber-merchant's visit he displayed a good deal of animation and loquacity. Doctor Margueron was sounded by Dumontier and Leglorieux. He had a grown-up daughter and no fortune, and the two went as far as



to hold out hopes of a brilliant marriage. They did not ask him anything, they left it all to his acuteness; but it was very clear that the condemnation of Monsieur de Clairefont would be decidedly to his advantage. The doctor had listened attentively and said little; and his previous conviction of Robert's innocence was only strengthened and confirmed by all the efforts he saw being made to establish his guilt. The stableman, that the count had nearly killed a year before, had left the country, but he had been traced to Mortagne whence he was to be brought to give evidence.

And thus the manœuvres of the adverse party were urged on with the greatest activity. There was already a rumor in the town that an eminent barrister, celebrated as the possessor of the sharpest tongue at the Paris bar, was to protect the interests of Chassevent, who was bringing an action for damages; and all these tales, related at Clairefont by the Saint-Andrés and the Torettes, who stood up manfully for their friends, threw Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice into agonies of fear. She wanted to see Pascal.

"If we could only talk to him and know what are his opinions and his hopes," said the old maid. "The duty of a lawyer is to reassure his clients first and next to gain his case. What and who is this invisible barrister? The moral influence of his name is all very well, but I shall not have any confidence in him until I have heard him talk for an hour straight off without stopping."

And Antoinette, giving way to her aunt's persistence, wrote to Maître Malézeau, asking him to bring Pascal to the chateau.

It was one of the most agitated moments of his life when Pascal stood with the attorney at the entrance gate of the chateau, where, the trace of the yellow bills could still be seen on the stone pillars. It was near the clump of bushes by the gate, that he had heard one evening, as he wandered round the park, the deer-hound growl at his vicinity and Antoinette speak softly to soothe and quiet the dog. He found himself in the hall without knowing how he had crossed the court-yard; then a door opened, and he saw Aunt Isabelle, the marquis and Antoinette in the drawing-room. A cloud floated before his eyes; there was a whirring in his ears; and it seemed to him that he was walking in the midst of flames. Then he distinguished Malézeau's voice, saying:

"May I present Monsieur Pascal Carvajan to you, marquis? Mademoiselle, Monsieur Pascal Carvajan."



The marquis, looking pale and venerable, smiled and waved his hand without rising, and said :

“He is very welcome.”

Pascal bowed, and seated himself near the fireplace, on a chair that Antoinette drew forward for him. In a large, deep arm-chair sat the marquis, still smiling and talking with a thin, expressionless voice which sounded like a tiny bell. And around the old man sat his daughter, with her faithful deer-hound stretched carelessly at her feet like a Sphinx, Aunt Isabelle, as red as the crater of an active volcano, and Malézeau.

Pascal looked anxiously for Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil, but could not see him. Perhaps he was in the chateau, or perhaps he had been compelled to return to Evreux to resume his military duties. Malézeau and Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice were talking, while Antoinette, sad and grave, listened abstractedly. Twice Pascal felt her eyes on him, but he dared not look up. “Can it be possible?” he was thinking, “can it really be that I am seated in this drawing-room beside her? Have I indeed overcome her repugnance after so much hatred and disdain? She has already stretched out her hand to me once, and now she throws open the door of her house to me. I am near her; I see her; I inhale the perfume which emanates from her. How have I won so much happiness, after so much sorrow?”

But a shadow stole over his mind. Was it Pascal Carvajan who was being received as a guest; was it to Pascal Carvajan that friendly glances were cast and hands affectionately held out? Were not these courtesies addressed merely to Robert’s defender, to the useful, powerful ally who could help to save the heir of the house? He was not admitted into their circle — he was tolerated, that was all. And what did they think of him? What was hidden behind this politeness with which they were welcoming him? Perhaps an ironic contempt for the renegade, the traitor. How did he know but what at that very moment Antoinette was thinking: “I am making use of you, but I despise you.”

He felt his heart expand and grow large. “What matter?” he told himself. “Is it for their sakes that I have resolved to break all the ties that bound me, in order to fulfil a terrible duty? Is it not first for my own sake, for the sake of my sense of right, my conscience, my honor? Let them think of me what they will!”

He was quite master of himself by now—cool, calm, and observant. He listened to Malézeau saying to Made-



moiselle de Saint-Maurice :

"There is a session in November, mademoiselle, and I think, mademoiselle, that, if the trial is to come on, it will come on towards the end of that month. The case is one of terrible simplicity, mademoiselle."

"And you will answer for this young man?" asked the old maid in lower tones.

"As for myself."

"Have you looked at him?" put in the marquis. "He is not like his father. No! no! Not at all. He will defend Robert. It was my idea—and you know my ideas are good ones."

Aunt Isabelle glanced uneasily at the attorney, and muttered under her breath :

"He makes me shudder."

Before she could say any more, Antoinette rose and moved towards the steps going down to the terrace. Pascal, drawn by an irresistible attraction, followed her. The deer-hound rose, lazily stretched himself; then came and smelt the young man, and looked at him with his wistful eyes as though to say: "I know you; I feel that, like myself, you are good, devoted and faithful." And he gently licked his hand.

"Funny animal!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice. "It's the first time I've ever known him to make friends with a stranger. He could never bear Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil."

On the top of the steps, Antoinette paused, and Pascal was able to gaze at her and intoxicate himself with the dangerous joy of having her for a few moments entirely to himself. He noted with admiration the delicate pallor of her complexion, the graceful fall of her shoulders, the proud elegance of her carriage. She wore a very simple dress of gray cashmere perfectly untrimmed; over her head she held a red sunshade, under which had crept an impertinent sunbeam to kiss her neck and cast a golden reflection on the little soft stray hairs that curled near her ears. She looked so charming that Pascal felt tempted to kneel as at the feet of a goddess. He had forgotten all—his anxiety, his distrust, his bitterness: he could think of, he could see, nothing but her. All disappeared before the divine beams of her grace and beauty; and he was in a heaven of bliss.

Then she spoke, and recalled him to earth again.

"You see, sir, what our house is," she said, with melancholy dignity; "the sad relic of a grandeur little worthy of envy. But such as it is, it is our home; and I



have my suspicions that it is thanks to you we still occupy it. You have found some way of making an arrangement which permits us to continue living beneath this roof—I am not well versed in questions of business; but it seems to me that so rapid and so favorable a change in our position could only have been effected by you. May we be as fortunate when Robert is in question!"

Pascal dared to raise his eyes to Antoinette's; and enveloping her with the caress of his deep voice, replied:

"If the will were sufficient, I would answer for your brother's safety; but I ought to promise no more than man can fulfil. Still I may assure you that I shall find unexpected strength in the knowledge that mine is the right cause; and the more difficulties with which it is beset, the more I shall do to bring it out triumphant."

Mademoiselle de Clairefont bent her head in token of assent; then lost herself in a deep reverie. Soon she sighed, and her eyes filled with tears. Pascal turned pale, and moved toward her; but she smiled, and said:

"Forgive me—I have so much grief, I forget myself." She resumed her former serenity, and went on a little haughtily. "You must be good enough to come here often, sir. We are sure to be calumniated, and you must learn to know us; you must live our life, in order to be able to defend us. It is a sacrifice, I know, that I am asking of you in requesting you to frequent a house where you will only find an invalid old man and two sorrowful women. But I hope you will be kind enough to resign yourself to it?"

He bowed without replying. He was trembling with joy and fear—enraptured at seeing the gates of the chateau thrown open to him, afraid as he thought of the agitation with which this intimacy must fill his heart.

They turned back to the drawing-room, and, as he entered, Pascal heard Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice say to Malézeau in furious tones:

"But he hasn't opened his lips! Such a silent barrister will never save the boy! No, you will never get me to believe that an advocate who doesn't speak once in two hours is able to get his client acquitted."

And the marquis answered in his thin, even little voice:

"It was my idea. Never fear, auntie—it was my idea, and it's a good one."

Pascal rejoined Malézeau, took leave of the old marquis and Aunt Isabelle, and went away, Antoinette accompanying him to the gate.



After this first visit, he called daily at Clairefont; and on the following afternoon he met Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil. He had very much disliked the idea of having any connection with the young officer, but he soon changed his opinions. He found the baron a courteous, reserved, somewhat cold man whose real merit he was not long in discovering. He felt still more favorably towards him, when he recognized in him a fellow-sufferer, instead of the happy rival he had dreaded. The pretty indifference with which Antoinette treated Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil seemed to Pascal the extreme of misery; for with his ardent temperament he would have found hatred infinitely preferable to this kindly insensibility. He saw that the baron loved Mademoiselle de Clairefont, though he had given up all hope. Robert's peril was the last tie that attached him to this house where he had dreamed of living happily, but where now he only suffered, and whither he came merely from a sense of duty. He found some words of delicate praise to address to his friend's defender, and behaved with a refined tact which at once gained Pascal's sincere liking.

The two young men presented a curious contrast in their devotion to Antoinette. Both were passionately in love, and both equally determined to hide it. The one was amiable, polished and light, hiding his sentiments with an easy, well-bred grace. The other, severe, cold and sarcastic, but ever and anon giving way to sudden bursts of passion, which made his eyes sparkle and flash.

While the days passed thus in weary waiting at Clairefont, in the Rue du Marché the disturbance was ever on the increase. Disappointed of his revenge, cheated of his booty, Carvaján gave way to a fit of fury which caused fears for his reason to be entertained. In the town, a reaction was taking place in favor of the victims against their tormentor. The material oppression which the banker exercised over his vassals left their moral powers free. If he was able to make them act according to his wishes, he could not force them to think as he chose; and the majority were decidedly in favor of the son against the father. Carvaján, with the wonderful intuition he had always possessed, managed to know the exact state of public opinion without going out of his house; and, after testing and weighing and considering it, he was angrily obliged to own that people did not hesitate between the young man who had never done anyone any harm and himself, the tyrant of La Neuville. When



Fleury tried to soothe him by telling him the contrary, he roughly interrupted the clerk by saying:

"Hold your tongue, you idiot, you don't understand what you're talking about! Pascal will be the ruin of us. You don't know him; but I ought never to have let him come home. He will twist everyone round his little finger when he begins to speak. Triple fool that I have been to quarrel with him! But I was carried away by my passion, and passion always makes a fool of one. If I had reasoned with him, instead of flying in a rage, we should have had Clairefont as the price of the liberty of that lout whose condemnation won't be very much satisfaction to me after all. I have behaved like a fool! You, yourself, Fleury, would not have been more stupid than I have been." And relieved by this outburst, he strode up and down his office, and went on: "If I could only see Pascal, perhaps things could be arranged even now. But he will not come here, and I cannot go to Malézeau's—I should look as if I were giving in. Oh, if only we could win back the victory at the last moment and gain the day when they thought to hold us in their power! What a triumph! But how is it to be done?"

One afternoon about five o'clock, as he was walking down from Clairefont, Pascal heard someone calling him. He stopped, and, at the corner of the Great Marl-Pit, found himself face to face with his father.

"Since you will not make the first advance, I must," said the old man. "Will you have five minutes' talk with me?"

He drew his son in amongst the woods, and seating himself in a hollow, said:

"You are making me very unhappy. I cannot accustom myself to the idea that you are making common cause with my enemies. At my age—when I have so short a time to live—to be separated from my son, and under such painful circumstances, is more than I can bear. Come, what must be done to put an end to this detestable dissension?"

"Oh, if you really want to end it, it will soon cease," said Pascal, joyfully.

"Well, come back home and give up the idea of defending Robert de Clairefont."

"I will come back to your house if you like, father; but I cannot shirk the duty I have taken upon myself."

"But if you defend those people, it is equivalent to condemning my conduct."

"Not necessarily; for I can let it be known that I am



doing so with your consent."

"Have you then committed yourself so far with these Clairefontes?" asked Carvajan, with increasing irritation.

"I have committed myself with no one but myself."

"Pascal!" cried the mayor. But then he stopped, and as though speaking to himself, "The fellow's as obstinate as a mule? He'll never listen—never! And yet he is being led—but he is blinded by love."

He took his son's arm and roughly shook it.

"Where are your eyes? Can you not see that the young lady up there has the captain of dragoons for her lover?"

"Father!" cried Pascal, turning white. "Oh, I will not listen to another word!" He hurried back to the road, and the banker followed him, still speaking:

"They don't marry, because they can do without the ceremony. That isn't my invention—the whole town says the same. Oh, how they must laugh at you together!"

Pascal gave a roar of fury, and turning round:

"Say no more!" he said, "or I might for once forget that you are my father!"

"Very well; then I won't say anything more about that. But do not leave me thus. Pascal, I suffer—Pascal, will nothing move you?" And he raised his face drawn with anguish to his son.

"Good-bye, father," said the young man gravely. "I will forget what you have just forced me to listen to, as a last proof of respect."

"Stay one moment more," cried the old man.

He turned very red, opened his lips to speak, but said nothing. Apparently he was under the influence of intense agitation; but at last he said in jerky tones, as if the words were being wrung from him:

"You do not know what you are doing. You are making yourself enemies from whom I may not always be able to protect you. Never come this way again. When you go up there, take the high road. Good-bye!" And he set off almost at a run towards Pourtois' inn, while Pascal went back to Malézeau's house thinking: "My father wanted to frighten me. What have I to fear?"

And he still continued to take the path by the Great Marl-Pit to go to Clairefont. But two days later, as he was returning to La Neuville he heard a report, and a branch of a birch tree, broken about a foot above his head, fell to the road. The young man leaped behind one of the thickets with which the road was bordered,



and there waited and searched around as far as his eyes could reach. A small cloud of white smoke was mounting amidst the crimson rays of the setting sun, but there was no one in sight. Whoever had fired had disappeared—had probably escaped among the gorse, or hidden in some chalk-pit. Pascal stayed still for some moments; then, stooping low so as not to be seen, went on his way.

“There can be no doubt but that it was Chassevent,” he said to himself. “But why did he not fire his second barrel? He had time enough. Perhaps he only meant to frighten me. And yet the ball passed very close.”

He remembered his father's caution. Evidently Carvajan suspected the poacher's project, and unable to make the savage brute obey him, had at least tried to put his son on his guard. Well, all affection was not dead in him.

Pascal said nothing about this incident at Clairefont; only he took another road thither.

The following week Robert was formally committed for trial; and the feeble hope, hitherto preserved, that the young count might be exonerated from the accusation against him, had to be renounced. Soon a rumor was spread through the town that the Count de Clairefont had been condemned. It took two days to correct this error; and even then it was not completely dispelled.

Pascal's task was commencing. He had to install himself at Rouen, not so much to study the case with which he was as well acquainted already as the examining magistrate, as to place himself in communication with his client. His last visit to Clairefont was a melancholy one. The weather had changed, and a heavy, drenching Normandy rain was falling. It seemed as if the very sky was turning into water, while La Neuville was enveloped in a thick mist, and yellowish clouds rolled up the alleys and walks in the park.

At the idea that Pascal might at last see Robert, Aunt Isabelle sprang up in a state of intense excitement.

“I will go with you!” she exclaimed, her face afire. “Oh, my dear boy, you will not be so cruel as to refuse to take me with you! I want to be there, to hear at once the words my poor child may say to you.”

“But, mademoiselle, you can speak to him yourself. I will obtain leave for you to visit him.”

“Let us go then, now—at once. I will just put a few things in a bag, and then I will be with you. Oh, my dear friend!” And the old maid threw her arms round Pascal's neck; then rushed excitedly to her room.



Antoinette felt sadder every moment. What mournful solitude was she about to endure after all this feverish emotion! She was going to be left in this great chateau with her father as her only companion, and Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil's flying visits would form the sole break in the monotony of their existence. Aunt Isabelle was going away with Pascal; and to the young girl it seemed as if her life would become a perfect blank. But was it Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice or Clairefont's newest guest who occupied so important a space in her thoughts? She felt angry with herself that such a question should be possible; she reproached herself for her weakness; and summoning her pride to her aid, she received the young man's adieux with haughty coldness.

"We shall not meet again before the decisive day," he said. "Promise me that you will be there. Your presence will be a great source of moral strength to your brother, and as for myself—" He paused; then said with a passionate accent she had never known him use before:

"As for me, be sure that for you and before you I shall accomplish the impossible."

She bowed without replying. Then he said farewell to the marquis, who could not be shaken from his smiling security; and, accompanied by Aunt Isabelle, he took his departure.

Left alone with the old marquis, it seemed to Antoinette that the day was gloomier, the rain more determined, the wind more cutting. She did not open her lips until the evening, but sat absently listening to her father who chattered on about nothing at all, like a worn-out windmill turning on and on though there is nothing to grind.

The next day but one brought Mademoiselle de Clairefont the delight of news from Aunt Isabelle. The old maid had written under the influence of an unwonted emotion—she had seen Robert. And, as the effect evidently of her gratitude to Pascal who had opened the prison doors to her, she talked almost as much of young Carvajan as of her nephew, confounding them in her affection.

"If you could only see how the poor boy is changed!" she wrote. "He has grown so thin and pale. When we went to visit him, it seemed to me as if the corridors we had to go through would never end; but at last the jailor stopped before a door pierced with a little hole to look through, opened it; and then we saw my boy. He gave an exclamation of delight when he saw me then as he



recognized Pascal, he drew himself up to his full height, and they stood for a moment facing each other. Robert did not know then that our friend was going to defend him; and in his surprise at seeing him, he forgot my presence. 'Why is the son of Monsieur Carvajan here?' he cried violently. Then the other replied in the voice you know, and with a mildness which touched me to the heart: 'To protect the honor and the liberty of the son of Monsieur de Clairefont.' They looked at each other, as if each were searching the other's very soul; then with a sigh they fell in one another's arms. They understood each other in a second. Then my boy threw pride to the winds, and, no longer restraining his feelings, wept bitterly between us two. We told him all—the marquis' illness and the events which have followed it. He seemed as though he would never tire of kissing me and pressing Pascal's hands. He sends you his best love, and says you are to kiss his father for him. We shall see him again to-morrow and every day now."

Antoinette watered this letter with her tears. She pictured to herself Pascal and Robert embracing one another, both confident and glad. What an equality in their affection, and yet how great the difference between them! Pascal the son of a *roturier*—Robert the descendant of the masters of the province. The one, with his bronzed complexion, his short hair, broad forehead, small nose, gray eyes and shaven lips, the impersonation of energy and intelligence; the other with ruddy cheeks, fair hair, large nose, blue eyes and long drooping moustache, the incarnation of courage and physical strength. It was a striking contrast and one which clearly defined the temperament and personality of each. She herself, as she pictured them thus side by side, asked herself which looked the prouder and the nobler—the aristocrat or the plebeian. And to the question she could make no reply.

Aunt Isabelle wrote every day now, and she seemed as if she could not say enough in praise of Pascal. They were both lodging at the carriage-builder's in the Saint-Sever quarter, sharing the expenses of their housekeeping.

"I do not know what I should have done without him," said Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice. "We pass our evenings chatting, and he tells me all about his travels. Ah, how I misjudged him at first, because of his timidity! For he really is as reserved and gentle as a girl. He talks to me for hours together, my dear, and



I could listen to him forever. I could never have believed a man's tongue could be so well oiled! And now that we are on confidential terms, he tells me everything. If you only knew what he has had to endure because of us! But he has expressly told me never to talk to you of it, and you see I do not betray my trust. Only, there is one little detail I must tell you, because it proves how uneasy our enemies are at Pascal helping us. A few days before we left for Rouen, Chassevent fired at the dear boy one evening in the valley of the Great Marl-Pit. Yes, those rascals actually tried to deprive us of our advocate! But he escaped, so he must be meant to triumph. That is what Fate wills, and that is what my dreams tell me."

Then a few days later:

"The great day is drawing near, the session has commenced. Pascal took me, yesterday morning, to see the Palais de Justice, which is a marvel of architecture; and he took me to hear a case tried to accustom me to a trial. I was awed. How majestic and terrible all those judges looked in their red robes! They made me think of a tribunal of Inquisitors. At one end of the room is a great Crucifix, towards which witnesses used to stretch their hands when they took the oath. Now they no longer swear before God — which will make it much easier for our adversaries to lie. But for all that I feel very confident. Yesterday we met Fleury, Tondeur, and Portois. The two first turned away like a couple of Jesuits, the last glanced at us entreatingly. Just fancy, that big man has fallen away so in these few weeks that you would hardly know him. The skin on his face hangs in loose folds, and he's as thin as a 'lathe.' Pascal feels sure that the miserable wretch has perjured himself, and that it is his remorse which is consuming him."

Then at length a last letter came:

"It is only three days now; but how slowly the time seems to pass! If you start from La Neuville the morning of the trial, you will get here at twenty minutes past ten, and that will be in plenty of time. I will meet you at the railway station in the Rue Verte. The Paris barrister is here—Pascal saw him this morning. The great man has gone to some friends of his at Malaunay for some shooting. He will speak between two *battues*. He is radical to the back-bone, and what makes him so vicious is that he has not yet managed to be elected senator. Why ever don't they elect him and rid us of him! As the terrible moment approaches, Robert becomes calmer. He confides in justice and his defender. He looks a little



more like himself; but that is not saying very much, as you will see for yourself. How I wish it were over!"

The morning of her departure, Antoinette, who, up to the last moment, had concealed the date of the trial from her father, was forced to own the truth. The old man was still in bed when she went to him. He raised himself on his pillows, while the smile which was now always hovering round his lips disappeared, and the meaning returned to his glance. Then he said in his old tones:

"My daughter, this is a time of terrible anxiety for us. Go and help your brother. Go and take my place, and show by your presence how sure we are that a Clairefont cannot have been wanting in honor. Take my blessing to my son, and tell him that whatever may be the result, I shall never doubt his innocence."

Then the old man laid his hand on his daughter's head, and added gently:

"Go, my child, and be brave."

## CHAPTER XI.

It was three o'clock, and daylight was beginning to fade in the assize court. The seats were crowded with an enormous throng, which gathered in the passages, and overflowed even into the spaces reserved for the reporters and barristers. In a corner of the first row of seats, where they were shielded from the gaze of the curious, Antoinette and Aunt Isabelle had been listening since morning to the terrible debate, on the result of which hung all they held most dear in this world—the honor and the life of Robert.

Before them lay the empty space in the middle of which was the Bar, and, beyond, the table with the incriminating articles—a woollen scarf and a silk handkerchief. Quite at the end of the hall sat the judges, impassive, severely grave and awe-inspiring. On the left was the jury-box, and on the right the dock, where stood a Clairefont between two gendarmes. Seated just below his client was Pascal in his black robe with the white ermine on his shoulder. The whole audience was wrapt in the deepest attention, and the struggle between the prosecution and the defence was growing hotter and hotter.

The examination of the prisoner had been favorable to Robert, who, following Pascal's advice, had displayed much tact and moderation. The declaration of Doctor Margueron had also left a good impression, but the evi-



dence of the other witnesses had had an opposite effect upon the jury. Tondeur and Fleury had told of deeds of terrible violence which the young count had committed, and Pourtois, with much hesitation and trembling, had described the scene of the murder. The Tubœufs and the stableman from Mortagne had next been called; and, making use of his discretionary power, the presiding judge had heard Chassevent's account of the crime.

This adverse evidence, skilfully twined together, formed a mass of proof very difficult to assail. Yet Pascal, with imperturbable coolness and decision, had carefully cross-examined the witnesses, casting doubt upon their testimony, and attempting to make them contradict each other. One point which he especially wanted to bring forward was the good terms on which Rose and Robert stood with one another. She had followed him that evening of her own free-will—he had not made any effort to persuade her. All the witnesses corroborated this, thinking it tended to prove the crime—ah, yes, poor child, she went gayly off upon his arm—they heard her laughing from the road. She did not want much coaxing to flirt with the son of the marquis, and he—!

In the dock, the oaken rail of which had been polished by the restless hands of successive generations of criminals, Robert stood perfectly impassive, listening. In his heart he was complaining bitterly against the iniquity of this trial. "I have often denied the existence of judicial errors," he thought, "and said that they were impossible. And yet I feel that I, an innocent man, am being overwhelmed by a mass of unanswerable evidence, and that those jurymen opposite, if their minds are not enlightened by the voice of my defender, will condemn me, thinking they are acting justly, and certainly according to their conscience." But he kept calm, making no denial to the accusations save by the proud firmness of his attitude. Once only when he heard Chassevent charge him with his violent temper, did he lose patience, and suddenly addressing the poacher, he cried:

"The crime of which you are accusing me, and which I did not commit, is not the only one of which the Great Marl-Pit has been the scene. A murder was attempted there quite recently, but of that you do not speak."

Chassevent turned pale, and the presiding judge ordered Robert to explain himself; but the young count's heat had died out again, and he only answered:

"I am not here to accuse, but to defend myself. That man knows very well what I meant." And it was impos-



sible to draw anything further from him.

But the prosecution had lost ground, and the auditors felt there was some mystery surrounding the accusers. Then the barrister who was supporting the action Chassevent had brought for damages, began to speak; and so the combat was renewed. Elegant, logical and treacherous, his speech entangled Robert in a net of moral proof, while it left the public prosecutor to dwell upon the material and circumstantial evidence of guilt.

During this terrible attack, Antoinette and Aunt Isabelle were on the rack. Their suffering was too intense for description. They thought the case lost. Never could Pascal efface the impressions left by this horrible diatribe in which Robert's character was analyzed with startling skill—all the good and generous side being left in obscurity and the rough, authoritative, violent traits brought prominently forward. Thus portrayed, the count was indeed the man who had committed the crime and stifled Rose in a movement of brutality, unintentional perhaps, but none the less fatal.

The speech of the public prosecutor put the finishing touch to the terror of the unhappy women. As he stood in his red gown, this hollow-voiced man seemed to them like the forerunner of the executioner. His threatening arm looked as though it would sweep off Robert's head, and to their terrified ears his emphatic eloquence had a sinister sound. The dramatic side of judicial display was having its effect upon them, and it threw them into a state of utter prostration. And yet they managed to understand that amidst all his sonorous, high-sounding words, the speaker conceded attenuating circumstances. It meant penal servitude instead of the scaffold; and the thought exasperated Aunt Isabelle to such a degree that her niece had all the difficulty in the world to prevent her interrupting the proceedings and causing an irremediable scandal.

"A Clairefont in prison—in a penitentiary, never!" ground out the old maid between her clenched teeth. "I would rather take him some poison myself."

"Listen, aunt," whispered Antoinette, "pray listen, and see how calm Monsieur Pascal still is."

"It's the calmness of despair!"

The peroration of the public prosecutor was an appeal to the severity of the jury—the enlightened protector of judicial equality—and an emphatic scourging of the idleness which leads to crime. His last words were followed by a startled silence.



Then the presiding judge slowly pronounced the customary phrase giving the defender the right of speech ; and amidst a murmur of curiosity, Pascal rose.

He was very pale; but never had ardent determination shone more plainly on a man's face. He turned and scanned his audience, allowing his eyes to rest on Antoinette for one brief moment as though seeking inspiration from her countenance; then he commenced to speak. His tones at first were low and almost indolent, as if he disdained to refute his adversaries' arguments; but there was a penetrating sweetness in them which sent a thrill of delight throughout the auditory.

Before he commenced to argue, he let the influence of his caressing voice have full sway. Like some great instrumentalist, he seemed to prelude the burst of his power by soft and delicate harmonies. It was so evident that he was entirely master of himself that the celebrated Paris barrister drew his brows together in a frown, and ceased to arrange his papers with an affectation of indifference. The judge was sitting erect in his deep arm-chair. The jury, a prey to that mental agitation which is always produced by a master, whether of music or of oratory, upon his hearers, sat motionless and intent. And in the whole, vast hall, which was darkened by the first shadows of evening, there was not a movement, not a whisper.

Pascal's melodious voice flowed on, endued with a still more poetic charm by the semi-obscurity amidst which it was heard ; and Antoinette, her heart throbbing, her nerves vibrating, listened to Robert's defender with mingled anguish and delight. She knew well that it was for love of her he was speaking, that all this seductive persuasion was being addressed to her. In her emotion she did not hear or understand what Pascal was saying; but his eyes, which never left her, were still more eloquent than his words. "I love you," they said; "all that I have done, all that I shall do, has been and will be to serve you. I am fighting for you, for you alone. Do not fear. Since it is your cause I am defending, I shall be endued with superhuman strength, and I shall triumph."

Antoinette felt a sudden confidence take possession of her. She was no longer afraid. She was in a kind of numb torpor in which she could not distinguish the phantom from the reality. It seemed to her that she was enveloped in a mist, and that she was losing consciousness of the things around her. She found herself being carried away into hazy space where she listened to the chanting of a divine voice which evoked the memory of her own



and her brother's childhood. Again she saw the park at Clairefont bathed in sunlight. A delicate-looking woman was walking on the terrace—it was the marchioness bearing on her brow the pallid impress of death. And next there were the orphans who had not known a mother's love and tenderness, and who, between their father utterly devoted to his scientific pursuits, and their aunt who loved, but was unable to guide them, had grown up in a liberty which was almost wildness. And the family lived a life of patriarchal monotony in the vast, silent, deserted chateau, with the children displaying a reverential affection for their father, and an absolute submission to all his caprices; and then gradually ruin drew nearer and nearer to the home, and the hostility to the old man, originating in the covetousness of the whole country side, grew more and more marked. Then as the dull, sullen struggle continued between the confederates, who longed to gain possession of the estate, and the marquis, now little more than a monomaniac, all the seamy, shady sides of the speculation were turned outside, and light was shed upon its darkness and its meanness.

And still the divine voice was sounding in her ears. But now it was no longer melancholy and caressing—it rang with a severe though sad sonority, and its touching accents fled straight to the hearts of its hearers. It rose in harmonious richness, filling every mind with strong conviction. The periods were shorter, the arguments more pointed as they rushed forth like attacking columns. And Antoinette listened, dominated by a feverish, absorbing curiosity, merging her identity in that of the man who was charming her ears, living his life, warming with his enthusiasm, breathing his breath, helping and encouraging him, until at last she was imbued with the idea that she was herself defending her brother—that these incisive, powerful words were the expression of her thought, and that it was she who was speaking through Pascal's lips.

The sensation was so real that it aroused her from her dream. Her eyes unclosed, and she saw again her aunt, the crowd, the Bench, her brother and his defender.

The pallor had fled from Pascal's cheeks, and his face glowed with a contagious excitement, while his gestures were now broad and vigorous. He was arguing and reasoning with scathing irony, basing his defense on the questions he had put to the witnesses in his cross-examination of them. He wrestled with his adversaries and overthrew them with a force that was irresistible. The edifice



of facts, so carefully raised to enclose and keep Robert prisoner, crumbled away to ruins. And by a clever gradation, the speaker had now arrived at the question of what motive Robert could have had to commit the crime, and was showing the impossibility of finding one in any way plausible.

Why should he have killed the girl? What object could he have had in doing so? What reason? What interest? There were no moral presumptions on which an enlightened mind could for an instant dwell, and the circumstantial proof was more than doubtful. Who had seen the murderer? Chassevent and Pourtois. Under what circumstances had they seen him? In the distance, in the dark, hurrying away. And what dependence could be placed upon the evidence of this father who was influenced by a cupidity shown in his demand for damages? Of course he would make Monsieur de Clairefont the culprit—Monsieur de Clairefont who would pay, and not the skulking good-for-nothing, the mysterious and real murderer who had not been searched for, because there was no wish to find him. And Pourtois! A trembling, frightened witness, tortured by terrors which seemed very like remorse, who stammered and waited for Chassevent to prompt him, and who, in short, had seen nothing but what the old poacher had told him to see. And it was on the testimony of such people as these that any one dared to base a capital accusation!

Ironic, indignant, scourging, he went on to speak of the conspiracy against the Clairefont family. He disclosed the snare in which Robert had been so skilfully caught, no longer choosing his words but aiming deadly blows, while his taunts and sarcasms hissed and whistled in the silence, like a volley of bullets. The terrified confederates saw all their strongholds fall one after the other, before the furious onslaughts of their adversary. He was left master of the field—all was overturned and swept away, and the accusation was reduced to nothing. Fleury, Tondeur and Chassevent glanced at each other in terror; Pourtois moaned and writhed on his seat as utterly limp as a burst balloon. Pascal's victory was assured, and his vanquished auditory began to sway and undulate in their desire to applaud and show their approval.

Then, suddenly returning to the soft, smooth gentleness with which he had begun to speak, he concluded his oration in tones more harmonious and more tender than those of a prayer. The rounded phrases floated on the air like the fumes from a censer. The clamor and the fury



vanished, leaving only tender and profound pity for the unhappy man who had suffered so unjustly. The phantom of the victim herself was evoked to plead in favor of the innocent. A delicious sense of peace stole over every listener—every vileness and wickedness were put aside to leave only candor and purity. Then the voice of the speaker died away in silence, and from the crowded court arose a murmur, prolonged and panting as a sob.

For the first time since the morning, Antoinette and Aunt Isabelle looked at each other without restraint. Their faces were bathed in tears, but hope shone once more in their eyes. They clasped each other's trembling hands, but neither dared to speak.

The sudden sound of noisy applause aroused them roughly from their joy. The barrister to whom the care of the civil action had been entrusted was rising in much irritation to reply. Feeling the necessity of striking some decisive blow, he did not hesitate to employ a personal mode of attack. With mischievous, diabolical ingenuity, he seized on what Pascal had said about the conspiracy against the Clairefont family, and made that the excuse for allusions of a savage ferocity. What! Was it Pascal who was denouncing these things? But could they be so reprehensible since, so it was said, it was his own father who had instigated them? Were financial operations to be presented in the light of shady machinations? The desire of convincing his audience had carried the counsel for the defence too far, and he had forgotten what he owed to justice, what he owed to himself. But the motives which had urged him to take up the defence of Robert de Clairefont were inexplicable, and they undoubtedly concealed a manœuvre by which the opinion of the jury was to be misled.

These few cold, pointed sentences caused a feeling of uneasiness in the court. The jurymen looked at one another, and Antoinette's heart grew heavy, for she knew how deeply the venomous words must wound Pascal. She felt at that moment as if she were witnessing a deadly combat. She grasped Aunt Isabelle's arm so tightly that her fingers almost left bruises on Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice's flesh; and she tried to pray, but the only words her lips could form were, "My God! My God!"

Pascal started to his feet. He shook his head as might a wounded lion his mane, his eyes flashed fire; and striking the bar before him with his clenched fist he cried:

"So this is to what you have come? In despair of harming the man I defend, you attempt to strike him



through me. You accuse me of having forgotten the name I bear, in taking up my present position, and you dare to question the clearness of my conscience! Well, then, my conscience shall give the reply. Yes, I have abandoned all, I have repudiated, I have forgotten everything, to lend Robert de Clairefont the aid of my speech; and that is the most brilliant proof of his innocence I could possibly give you. If he had committed this crime, what man should I be—I, the son of his father's enemy, I, who am supporting and encouraging him? His guilt means mine, my honor vouches for his. And so at this moment, every force and energy in my being arises to attest to you that he is not guilty!"

It was the expression of so great an exasperation, an outbreak of such violence that the two women forgot all, and saw nothing but Pascal standing superb in his indignation, radiant with pride. For some seconds he was simply transfigured, as he glanced defiantly at his opponent, ready to continue the struggle, to lay bare his heart, to have the knife thrust into his quivering flesh, if needs were, to assure the triumph of his cause. All around him he saw faces glowing and eager with emotion. He guessed that the battle was won, and, with an ample gesture which included the whole court, he said:

"Now, I think I have said enough. Any further insistence would be but an insult to my hearers."

And that was the last cannon boom of the battle.

The presiding judge read over the usual formula to the jury, in a sulky voice, and seeing the shattered condition of the prosecution, mentioned, as a last hope, the subsidiary question of death having been caused by wounds or blows inflicted without the intention of killing. But his summing up was almost equivalent to an abandonment of the case. Then the judges withdrew, the jury retired to deliberate upon their verdict, the prisoner was taken out of court, and with noisy animation the audience rose and stretched their limbs.

The *prétoire* was besieged with barristers who crowded round Pascal, and enthusiastically congratulated him on his speech. The great *confrère* from Paris himself threaded his way through the throng of junior counsel to compliment his opponent, and Aunt Isabelle was lost in astonishment as she saw the two men shake each other by the hand and smile.

"What! He is speaking to him! I should have thought he would have tried to strangle him after what they have been saying to each other!"



"They were only words, auntie. Blown away by the wind as soon as uttered."

"Oh, my dear, did you hear our Pascal? What a splendid fellow, to be sure! I could hardly breathe there was such a lump in my throat—and I went first cold, then hot! Goodness, what talent it must need to move people to such a degree! And did you notice the jury? Oh, my child, how pleased I am!"

"Wait a little while auntie; it is not all over yet."

"Nonsense! Can there be any doubt of the verdict? All those men can't surely have been bought over by Carvajan, and the case is as clear as daylight."

The old maid jumped to her feet as if moved by a spring. Pascal was standing before her. He had slipped away from the admiration of his brother-barristers and had come to seek his recompense—a look, a word from Antoinette.

"Well, my dear boy," exclaimed Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice, excitedly, "he is saved, isn't he?"

"I hope so," answered the young man; "and it is the general opinion; but with a jury one never knows. We must wait patiently."

"How long the time seems!" murmured Antoinette.

"It will seem short when you are going home with your brother."

"Oh, is it possible that I may do so? I have so despaired."

"Well, you will know in a moment now."

The little bell rang, announcing that the jury had decided. A deep hush, which oppressed the two women painfully, fell over the hall; and the public resumed their seats in impatient curiosity. Pascal regained his place at the bar; then the judges came in, looking stern and sombre. The lamps had been lighted during the interval, and the dull, severe faces of the magistrates stood out sharply against the high, dark wainscoting. The jury re-entered, and rising to their feet, all awaited the verdict with eager anxiety. Then the thin, trembling voice of the foreman was heard saying:

"On my honor and my conscience, before God and before man, the verdict of the jury on all the charges is—Not Guilty."

From every part of the court arose a glad, excited acclamation at the acquittal. Then, when quiet reigned again, the prisoner was brought back to his place; and as he stood anxious and trembling, a frightful bellowing was heard like that of an animal being killed. It was Made-



moiselle de Saint-Maurice, who, for the first time in her life, was hysterical. Twenty people at once hurried to the old maid's assistance, and the words of the judge, non-suiting Chassevent's claim and commanding the release of Robert were lost amidst an uproar impossible to allay. Then the judges retired, the *prétoire* was deserted, and the usher called for the court to be cleared.

"Auntie, let us go and find Robert!" exclaimed Antoinette.

These words at once restored Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice to her senses; and rising to her feet, she put her hat straight with a scared gesture, and stammered out:

"Where is the boy?"

Guided by Pascal, supported by her niece, she reached the door by which the witnesses had entered the court; and there, in the ante-room, she found Robert awaiting her. She hurried to him with outstretched arms; but he anticipated her, and pressing Pascal to him, cried:

"This one first! And you must not be angry with me for saying so, you whom I love so dearly!"

"Oh, no!" replied Aunt Isabelle, in a transport of delight. "He has well deserved it."

The young count caught hold of his sister and his aunt, gathered them to his broad bosom, laughing and crying at the same time; then, pushing them towards his defender:

"Kiss him!" he cried. "I owe him my life; for I had resolved to kill myself, if I were condemned."

With a thrill Antoinette found herself quite close to Pascal. The room seemed to swim round her, and she thought she was going to fall, but she managed to take his hand and press it convulsively; and then with an exquisite emotion, she felt her hair brushed by the lips of her brother's defender.

Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice could not take her eyes off Robert. It seemed as though she had not seen him for ages.

"You do not look like you did yesterday, my poor boy," she said.

"No, aunt. To-day, mine is the face of a happy man."

"My dear count," said Pascal, "if you will take my advice, you will not stay here any longer than you can help. We will go and get the formal permission for you to leave the prison, and you can catch the eight o'clock train to La Neuville. In the meantime, perhaps, the ladies will send a telegram to Monsieur Malézeau, who will bear the news to your father. We must not delay his joy by



a minute."

"You are right, as always! But are these good men going to come with us?" he asked, designating the gendarmes who were standing a little apart.

"They must take you back, in the same way as they brought you."

"They have been very kind to me. Aunt, give me all the money you have about you." And he emptied the contents of Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice's purse into the hands of the astonished men; then, turning to Pascal, said: "Let us go. I confess I am eager to be free to go whither I choose."

By nine o'clock, they were in sight of La Neuville. The train slackened speed on the Pont de la Thelle, and whistled to announce its entrance into the railway-station. Robert, leaning out of the window, saw the lamps in the distance, dotting the darkness with brilliant spots. At last he nervously rose to his feet saying:

"In half an hour we shall be kissing our father."

But a surprise was awaiting him at the station. On the platform he found Croix-Mesnil walking up and down. The two friends uttered a simultaneous exclamation of pleasure, and before the train had stopped, the count had leaped out, and was exchanging some rapid words with the baron. The latter, with moist eyes and beaming face, bowed to Antoinette and Aunt Isabelle, pressed Pascal's hand, and saying, "Come along," led the way out of the station. They crossed the waiting-room, and before the door, seated in the old britska, they found the marquis.

He was awaiting, with Malézeau, the arrival of his son. He had wished, as the head of the family, to be there to receive him, and thus in a way solemnly to reinstate him in his former position. Robert, who had borne unflinchingly all the terrible trials that had befallen him, broke down before this manifestation of his father's affection; and fell upon the old man's neck, weeping like a child.

"There's a group of happy people, Pascal," said Malézeau, "and it is to you they owe their joy. I hope they will not forget it."

The young man sadly shook his head.

"I shall not allow their gratitude to be a heavy burden to them," he replied.

And approaching the carriage, he took his leave in a few brief sentences, steadfastly refused the pressing invitation of Robert who wanted him to go to Clairefont, and went away with Malézeau. He watched the carriage which was bearing off Antoinette disappear in the dark-



ness; then with a sigh he muttered :

"It is all over!" And was not his dream of happiness indeed at an end? He walked on with Malézeau through the silent, slumbering town. As they passed through the Rue du Marché, they noticed a light in the windows of Carvajan's office.

"Your father is up late," said the lawyer. And as some dark shadows moved across the blinds :

"He is not alone," added Pascal. "Fleury and Tondeur caught the train before ours, and no doubt they are holding a council of war at this very moment. What can they still wish to do?"

"Nothing, I would swear. I met Monsieur Carvajan at seven o'clock this evening—I had gone to the telegraph office to ask if the telegram I was so impatiently awaiting had not come. Your father, for the same reason, was already there. We bowed to each other in silence; for we had not spoken for more than three weeks; and we waited there in much anxiety. In about a quarter of an hour the telegraphic apparatus began to move, and the clerk, who shared our curiosity, called out to us, 'Acquitted!' We did not wait to hear more, but came away. Outside, your father paused; he was very pale, and I thought he was going to faint. I went up to him; he caught hold of my arm, clung to it, and said in stifled tones: 'I was sure he would win the day. From the moment he turned against us, I looked upon all as lost. He is a Carvajan, you see. He has all my determination combined with his education and a *je ne sais quoi* that he has got from his mother.' 'A noble heart,' I said. He bent his head. 'Perhaps that is the secret of his strength,' he muttered. 'He has different ideas from other people's, and he can express them in a way that no one else can. Oh, I know him well. I told them that Pascal would beat us all. The fools! They wouldn't believe me. He must have spoken well. That chatter-box from Paris, who has cost me such a sum in fees didn't have an ounce of influence, I know, or the Avocat-Général either! He swept them all before him! Ha, ha! he's a true Carvajan!' Your father concluded with a gesture of pride; then he said no more until he reached his own door. There he stopped, and holding me by the button of my coat, 'Malézeau,' he said, 'shall we be friends again? Bring me my son to-morrow morning.' And seeing that I was about to speak; 'Not a word,' he added. 'Think it over first, and advise the boy. Good-bye.' And he went indoors. You can see from that, that he has no intention



of continuing the struggle. Besides he could not, even if he would. But do you feel inclined to gratify his desire?"

"I am quite willing to see my father," said Pascal, "but I will not go to his house. He has turned me out of it."

"I will let him know what you say." They had reached the lawyer's door by this time, and they entered the house.

"You will have some supper, will you not?" asked Malézeau.

"I am not ashamed to own that I am dying with hunger, and ready to drop with fatigue."

"Come, my dear," said the lawyer to his wife, who was rushing downstairs, showering felicitations on Pascal in a voice trembling with delight, "here is a young conqueror who stands less in need of congratulation than of cold chicken. Lead the way to the dining-room, if you please."

Pascal slept the sleep of victory that night; and it was broad daylight when he awoke. In the garden, laid bare by the autumn winds, the birds were chirping merrily as they chased one another amongst the leafless shrubs. The young man rose, and seeing how blue the sky was:

"They are happy at Clairefont this morning," he thought. "It must be pleasant out on the terrace, in the sun."

In his imagination he could see a stately girl walking up and down on the golden gravel by the stone balustrade. Her dress was no longer black, but bright and gay as her own thoughts. Beside her walked a tall young man, as he, Pascal, had done, nearly every day, during the time of trouble. But when happiness returned to the house it had driven the protector out, and it was now Robert or Croix-Mesnil who accompanied Antoinette in her walk. "Did I not know beforehand that it would be thus?" thought Pascal. "And am I going to complain? No, no! Let them be glad even at the price of my own happiness. By restoring peace to their minds, and tranquillity to their hearts, I have only acquitted my father's terrible debt."

He went down to the garden, and sauntered along the box-boarded paths, listening to the murmur of a little fountain which rippled into a basin in the middle of the lawn. Just as the mayoralty-clock struck eleven, a window on the ground-floor was opened, and Malézeau appeared, saying,

"Pascal, will you come into my office?"



The young man went into the house, passed through the study, opened a door, and saw his father standing by the mantel-piece in the lawyer's office. He stood motionless, gazing at the banker, and thinking how changed he looked. Malézeau gathered up some papers and went into the study, leaving the father and son together.

"Pascal," said Carvajan, holding out his hand.

Coldly the son placed his in it. Then drawing forward a chair for his father, he remained standing before him.

"Are you willing that all should be forgotten?" asked the mayor after some hesitation. "You see, it is I who come to you. I have been wrong. But you have forced me to make bitter expiation for my faults."

"Father, it does not depend solely on me that all should be forgotten. I am not the only one in question. There are—"

"The people up there," growled Carvajan, pointing towards the hill. "Well, what more do they want? You have assured their triumph. They have got the best of it. Do they want me to go and tender my homage as well?" And with a dreadful laugh, the old man added: "Ah, if they had not had you!" Then changing his tone: "I suppose they will know how to show their gratitude?" he said.

Pascal could not help a blush rising to his cheek.

"I expect no recompense from anyone, father."

"Not even from the beautiful Antoinette? She would be indeed ungrateful, if, after all you have done for her, she did not love you."

"I propose going away next week," said Pascal, abruptly, "and it will be a long while before I return to La Neuville again."

"Indeed? And they will allow you to go? But, of course, why should they keep you? They have no further need of you. You have saved the heir of the house, and you have given them your money—what more is there for them to get? You would only be in the way, my poor boy; your presence would be a constant reminder of the services you have rendered. You will always be very much liked; but if you're at a distance, it will be so much pleasanter!"

"Father!"

"Listen—will you stay? For you, I will give up all my schemes of ambition. People know now what you have in you, and if you would stand at the next election



no one would dare to offer himself as an opponent. You might be the master of the district, if you liked ; we could rule it, Pascal. Do you understand what I am ready to do for your future? If you choose—well, we could make the thankless understand what a man like you is worth. Come, give me your hand — of your own free will, this time!”

The young man sadly shook his head.

“I thank you, father, but my mind is made up, and I shall not alter it. It will do me good to expatriate myself for a little while.”

“Then you will accept nothing at my hands?”

Pascal looked fixedly at his father.

“Will you give me what I ask you?”

A furrow came on Carvajan's forehead; still, he answered:

“Make your request.”

“Well, then, my task is still incomplete. I have obtained an acquittal for Robert de Clairefont; I have snatched him from the hands of the law; but I have not quite washed away the stain which soils his honor; I have not found the real culprit. Father, help me to obtain this last success, and many disagreeable recollections will be effaced from my memory.”

The old man sat lost in thought; he seemed to forget he was not alone.

“The same nature,” he muttered; “the same ardor, the same determination; only he has not drawn his strength from rancor, as I have done. He has devoted himself to his love as I have devoted myself to my hatred. What is the good of raising obstacles? He will only overturn them.”

Then, emerging from his meditation:

“I cannot tell you what you wish to know—I do not know it myself. But Chassevent no longer dares to lay snares at night in the Clairefont valley, and Pourtois is but the shadow of his former self. The Great Marl-Pit contains a secret—it is there you must search.”

“Thank you. I will search.”

Carvajan had risen.

“You will not go away without seeing me again,” he said.

“No, father.”

“Very well.”

They shook hands a second time, and then the mayor left.

About three o'clock, Robert arrived in quest of Pascal.



At the chateau they were all astonished that he had not yet been to see them, and Aunt Isabelle in particular was furious.

Then they set out for Clairefont. It was a lovely autumn afternoon. The beeches in the park had turned a deep, rich red which made the green of the firs look still more sombre by contrast. The air was soft and mild, and the larks were soaring high into the sky, gayly carolling the while. The two young men took the path where Chassevent's bullet had passed so close to Pascal's head; and the barrister showed his friend the birch tree with the branch broken off.

"It's a good thing for you the rascal hadn't loaded his gun with buck-shot," said the count. "If he had, he would most probably have killed you. And then where should I have been now?"

A hundred yards farther on, Robert stopped, and pointing to a large gap in the thicket, where the ground was very much trodden and trampled:

"Why, look!" he said. "Can there be big game here of a night?"

Pascal stooped down, and tried to find the impress of an animal's foot in the chalky soil of the path, but he could only see large, blurred tracks.

"Oh, don't trouble to look. See how high up the branches are broken—it must certainly be some deer. We'll have something to say to them some of these days if you like."

Pascal made no answer: he was thinking; and they finished their walk to the chateau in silence.

They found the dining-room empty, so they went out to the terrace, where the whole family was sitting in an arbor—the marquis lying lazily back in a large bamboo arm-chair, while Antoinette read the paper to him, and Aunt Isabelle, her face redder than ever, busy with her everlasting knitting. For the first time for a very long while, the occupants of Clairefont had resumed their tranquil, domestic life; and they no longer avoided each other in an endeavor to hide their anguish and their tears; for now they had only smiling faces to show.

It was Fox who announced the arrival of the two young men by his barks of delight.

"Ah, here at last is the companion of my exile!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice. And taking the barrister by the shoulders, she kissed him on both cheeks. "Ah, my dear boy, to-day our hearts are not so heavy, are they, eh?"



Pascal bowed ceremoniously to Mademoiselle de Clairefont; then he looked round for Croix-Mesnil, but the baron had gone back to Evreux only that morning. The marquis found all sorts of kind words in which to thank his son's defender. During the last three weeks he had made rapid strides towards health. He had recovered all his faculties, but the violent shock to which he had succumbed had left an unconquerable indolence behind it. He no longer busied himself with his inventions; and the laboratory was forsaken. He himself told Pascal of this singular change, finishing gayly by saying:

"In fact, now I don't want to work at all; and that, I believe, is the surest way to rebuild my fortune."

He took the young man's arm and slowly walked along the terrace with him.

"There are, I know, some questions of interest to be settled between us," he said, "but I will not insult you by speaking to you about money. Malézeau is there to arrange all that."

"I will discuss money matters very seriously with him, sir, if you will allow me to do so," replied Pascal. "I have reasons for thinking that the Great Marl-Pit could be made a source of great profit to you. An active, intelligent manager would soon put it into working order again; and I will undertake to find an engineer who will devote himself to the task."

The marquis watched his companion narrowly as he listened to him, and the young man explained his views and ideas with a practical lucidity which made a great impression on Monsieur de Clairefont. When, tired of walking, the old man returned to Aunt Isabelle and Antoinette, he took advantage of the absence of Pascal and Robert to say:

"I have just been talking business to Monsieur Carvajan, and he has astonished me. He is really a very remarkable man."

"Do you think I have not found that out before now?" cried Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice, impetuously. "I know him—I, who have lived with him, like mother and son. He is nothing short of a marvel. And you take to yourself the honor of the discovery!"

Antoinette, bending over her embroidery, did not utter a word; but her fingers shook strangely as they plied the needle.

Pascal stayed to dinner at the chateau. All the evening he was very reserved in his behavior, and about ten o'clock he took his leave. Robert offered to go with him



as far as the little gate in the park, and as he was kissing his aunt, she asked:

"What is the matter with Pascal this evening? He is perfectly icy. One cannot get a word from him; isn't it so, Antoinette?"

"Well, aunt, I have not noticed—"

"Oh, you never do see anything, do you?"

It was a very dark night, and Robert told Bernard to bring him a lantern. The old servant seemed uneasy, and said:

"If you will allow me, sir, I will go with you. Once night has fallen, it is not very nice to be about alone."

"But why not?" asked Pascal.

"Begging your pardon, sir, but since the accident, all about the Great Marl-Pit is haunted, as you might say. And things happen there at night that are best not seen."

"Nonsense, you old stupid!" said Robert. "Those are tales of a coward or a drunkard. But, make yourself easy, I am not afraid of anything I may meet."

He took the lantern and set off with Pascal. They went down the slopes of the park until they reached the short cut to the town. The count drew the bolts, opened the door, and prepared to go on as far as the outskirts of La Neuville; but his companion would not hear of such a thing.

"Here is the high road," he said, "and I could find my way along it blindfolded."

After many friendly protestations, Robert turned back, and Pascal found himself alone. But instead of continuing his walk towards La Neuville, he turned in the direction of Pourtois' inn. The tavern was closed and silent, though a faint light shone through the crack of the door. Pascal gained the narrow footpath that runs beside the Great Marl-Pit, and muffling the sound of his steps as much as he could, walked up it towards Couvrechamps, attentively watching everything around him the while. His only weapon was his iron-wood stick; but he was accustomed to nocturnal walks through fields and woods, and his heart was not beating any faster than usual. Suddenly he stopped—he had just recognized the gap to which Robert had drawn his attention that afternoon. Then he went on about fifteen paces farther, and seeing an enormous juniper tree growing amidst the heath by the roadside, he stationed himself with his back against it; and, perfectly invisible in the dark, deep shadow, waited.

The sky was studded with stars. The moon was rising



like a coppery disc above the woods of La Saucelle; and soon the fields would be flooded with her clear, cold light. The silence in the deserted valley was disturbed by strange, faint rustles—plants were opening their thirsty cups to the dews of night, insects were sliding and crawling from branch to branch, and the shadows were alive with nocturnal frolics.

Pascal thought of the evening he had just passed at Clairefont. Not once had Antoinette spoken to him. Her behavior had been such as he had known it before he had rendered his services to her family—cold and haughty. When he thought she would be forced to bestow her confidence and friendship upon him, he found her indifferent and drifting away from him. Was she utterly heartless? The day before, during the trial, he had seen her weeping as he spoke. For a short moment he had dominated and taken possession of her; he had entered her rebellious heart as its sovereign master. But the impression had been but a passing one, and he had been speedily deprived of his conquest.

Ah, what comfort and joy would one word from her have brought him—one word of loving gratitude! In his hunger for affection, he would have hailed the testimony of a kindly feeling as a supreme consolation, and the memory of it would have flourished and bloomed in his desolate heart, like a flower springing up among some ruins.

The Clairefont clock striking twelve changed the course of Pascal's ideas. The moon was now high in the heavens, and the valley was bathed in silvery light. "Until what hour ought I to wait? I am here like Horatio waiting for the ghost of the dead king on the platform of Elsinore. If my father has not deceived me, whom am I going to see? And if anyone does come, will he pass where I am standing?"

Some secret instinct told him that his position was well chosen, and he stayed obstinately on. He amused himself by watching the gambols of two hares playing on the path, while on the Clairefont heights a fox was barking to summon his vixen who was lying hid. But about one o'clock he began to lose patience; and he was about to go away, intending to come again the following night, when the hares suddenly pricked up their ears and leaped into the thicket. There was a sound of footsteps on the path.

A thrill ran through Pascal's frame; he clinched his teeth, and tightened his grasp upon his thick stick. The



footsteps drew nearer and nearer, ringing clearly in the silence like those of a man advancing without any fear or precaution. A shadow fell across the moonlit path; and Pascal recognized Roussot, bare-headed and with his clothes all disordered.

He came on, his eyes open and fixed and vacant, his movements stiff and automatic as though he were obeying a force of which he was unconscious. He passed by, and strode through the gap. Pascal at once started to follow him, but the shepherd did not seem to hear him. He walked on straight before him without hesitating, without pausing, with the regular, even motion of a machine. When he reached the edge of the hollow where Rose had been found dead by her father and Pourtois, he stopped. An expression of despair came over his face, he wrung his hands; then with a doleful wail, he went on his way again, going in the direction of Couvrechamps. Pascal continued to follow him, and thus they arrived at the cemetery. The idiot vaulted over the low wall, and going to a grave, at the head of which stood a simple wooden cross, he threw himself on his knees and began to moan. He fell on the stone and passionately kissed it, murmuring in tones of supplication: "Oh, Rose! Forgive me, Rose!" And it was a dreadful sight to see this madman calling to the dead girl amidst the silence and solitude of the graveyard, with sobs of love and remorse.

For a long time Roussot remained there, writhing in an agony of regret; then at last he rose and departed as he had come.

Pascal stayed leaning against the wall, lost in thought. The veil had been abruptly torn asunder, and now he knew the truth. In an instant his imagination grasped the scene of the murder. How was it he had never guessed this before? Again he could see Roussot teasing and playing with Rose with dangerous glee. Within this being deprived of reason, a passionate desire had sprung up, and with the ferocious bestiality of a wild animal he had attempted to gratify it. In the paroxysm of his amorous fury, he had carried Rose off by main force, but the unexpected arrival of Chassevent and Pourtois had forced him to fly; and the force of his embrace had been mortal. He had killed the girl when he had only meant to stifle her cries, and now he passed his days in thinking of her, and his nights in seeking her and calling her in the nightmare of his phantom-haunted sleep.

And thus he could be made to betray himself and furnish proofs of his own crime. It was sufficient to see him



walk moaning through the heath, and roll in horrible ecstasy on the grave-stone, to dissipate all doubt. But would he repeat on the morrow what he had gone through just now? Would he perform every night this terrible pilgrimage to the scene of his crime?

Twice more Pascal came, and twice more he witnessed the same sight. The somnambulist came, crossed the heath, paused by the excavation; then went on to the cemetery, each time his frightful nightmare following the same course. Then, without mentioning his discovery to a soul, Pascal called on Jouselin, asked him to accompany him to the house of the Procureur of the Republic; and there he related what he had seen, and requested that some one might accompany him to verify the decisive fact.

"I am entirely at your disposal," said the Procureur, very much impressed, "and I will take the necessary measures to render our expedition legally useful. Then perhaps Monsieur de Clairefont has been the victim of a deplorable judicial error after all? We thought that you had snatched a culprit from our hands," he added, smiling, "though we could not but admire your victory. But if you client is innocent, we shall owe you untold thanks; for in France the magistracy is always ready to own a mistake, and only seeks the truth."

"Then, if you are willing, we will meet at the little park door this evening, at eleven o'clock. Monsieur Jouselin can post his men inside the church and conceal himself near the cemetery; for though I am sure that the shepherd can neither see nor hear when he is in that condition, it is safer for us to hide ourselves."

At five o'clock Pascal appeared at Clairefont, where he was totally unexpected. He was hailed with exclamations of delight by Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice and Robert, and the marquis received him as usual with the utmost graciousness. Antoinette walled herself in with a somewhat sombre gravity. Lately there had been a great change in her. She, who used to be the light and life of the house, would now sit for hours together without opening her lips; and if her aunt touched her to arouse her, she would start as though suddenly recalled from the land of dreams. She was sweet and gentle, as she had always been, but she had evidently some secret which occupied all her thoughts. Croix-Mesnil had obtained a week's leave and was staying at the chateau. He took immense pains to please and distract the young girl, accompanying her on her walks and doing his best



to make her talk. His conversation was generally about the trial, and he used gradually to bring it round to Pascal. Often he would launch forth in excessive praise of the young barrister as if he wished to provoke a retort and would have been only too happy to be contradicted. At such times Antoinette would look at him with a strange expression in her eyes, and simply let the conversation drop.

On this particular day, when Mademoiselle de Clairefont saw Pascal coming, she turned to the baron, and said abruptly:

"See, here is your friend."

Croix-Mesnil turned a little pale, but he answered very quietly:

"I do not deny that he is my friend. I like everyone who is devoted to you."

Antoinette raised her head, glanced searchingly at the young man, and replied:

"If you meant what you said, you would be either the least in love or the most generous of men." Then she passed before him to go and meet her brother's defender, and so did not see the cloud of sadness which darkened Croix-Mesnil's face.

During dinner and all through the evening, Pascal was unusually gay. He, who was generally so grave and reserved, allowed his wit full play and held them all under the charm of his conversation. He revealed a new Pascal they had never known before, but whom they liked infinitely. Aunt Isabelle sat drinking in the words of her favorite, and between him and Robert she was simply beaming.

"Is he not charming? I assure you he has completely 'exorcised' me," she could not help saying to the marquis in an outburst of enthusiasm.

At half-past ten Pascal rose to take his leave, in spite of Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice's protests, and asked Robert to walk with him.

"Only, without any lantern, if you please. If we miss our footing, so much the worse; we must pick ourselves up again, that's all."

The two friends went off through the park. Soon they reached the little door, opened it and stepped out on to the road. A dark form emerged from the shadow of the wall, and a voice asked:

"Is that you, Monsieur Carvajan?"

"Yes, it is I, Monsieur le Procureur de la République, and Monsieur de Clairefont is with me."



"But what does this mean?" asked Robert, with sudden distrust.

"It means the complete vindication of your character, sir," replied the Procureur. "And allow me to assure you of the pleasure it will give me to proclaim it."

"And now do not let us talk any more," said Pascal. And leading the way he went silently up the path by the Great Marl-Pit.

For two hours, Jousselin had been watching behind a little willow in the cemetery. He had posted one of his men at an angle of the wall whence he could survey the Couvrechamps road, and two others were hiding in the church. Woods and fields were wrapt in silence. The moon, which was now full, cast blue reflections on the slated roof and spire of the little church; and it was so light that the inscriptions on the tombs could be easily deciphered. Jousselin was chilled to the marrow—for there was a white frost—yet he did not dare move a limb, and waited in patient stillness. Still he began to feel a little anxious—suppose the shepherd did not come? Robert had always had the sympathy of the good-hearted commissary since the day of the confronting with the body; and he would have been delighted to see the last doubts, which some were still obstinate enough to entertain about the count's innocence, dispelled.

It was two o'clock in the morning when he heard the low whistle which was the signal he had agreed upon with his men to be given at the approach of anyone. Soon the ringing sound of footsteps was heard upon the hard road; the ivy with which the wall was covered rustled as if some heavy body were brushing against it; and Roussot appeared with the moon shining full upon him. His eyes were open, but they were visionless.

He slipped over the wall into the cemetery, stalked stiffly along the path between the tombs, and going straight to the stone which covered poor Rose, he began to call her in smothered tones. Pascal, Robert and the Procureur entered through the church-yard gate, purposely left ajar. They had followed the idiot across the valley, and now they stood silent and frozen with horror as they watched the lugubrious termination of this nocturnal expedition. Crouched on the tombstone which he was eagerly kissing, Roussot continued his supplication, while the tears streamed from his eyes, which were strangely dilated. "Forgive me, Rose! Oh, forgive me!" he muttered over and over again. And seizing the wooden cross with a convulsive grasp, he shook it till it fell on the grass.



The watchers had approached and surrounded the shepherd, but he did not notice them; and, absorbed in his passionate fury, he continued to cry and rave. At a sign from the Procureur, Jouselin tapped the idiot on the shoulder. Roussot felt the touch, looked up; then rose to his knees. He passed his hands over his face, as if he were awakening, threw one terrified glance around him; then his eyes grew bigger, his features worked and twitched, a yell issued from his lips; and, darting past Jouselin, he bounded towards the wall. But there he saw a man seated astride the coping; then he ran all around the cemetery, found the gate guarded; and, after stamping wildly for a moment like a hunted beast, noticed that the church door stood a little open, and rushed towards it.

"Look out! Look out!" cried Jouselin to his men. "He'll get away from us!"

There came the sounds of a struggle and some low, sullen growls; then one of the men ran out of the church, crying:

"He is climbing into the steeple!"

By the light of the moon, the idiot could be seen at one of the openings of the spire. Then the steps of the detective following him echoed through the church. Roussot climbed the ladder leading to the beams which supported the bell, standing like a horrible, fantastic apparition, with grinning face, hair on end, and face livid with fear.

His pursuer appeared beneath him, mounting higher and higher. The shepherd glanced at the summit of the steeple, and with the agility and strength of a gorilla commenced crawling along the girders. For a moment he stood upright on a narrow ledge; then, apparently seized with giddiness, he swayed to and fro as though fascinated by the sense of nothingness around him, gave a ghastly shriek of laughter, and, losing his footing, fell into space.

Robert, Pascal and the Procureur had but the time to leap backwards as Roussot's body, turning over and over in its fall, described a large curve, and fell with a thud on Rose's grave, bespattering with its blood the stone yet wet with the shepherd's tears.



## CHAPTER XII.

Three days later, in the drawing-room of the chateau, where the whole family was assembled, Maître Malézeau gave an account of the various transactions committed to his care. The marquis' debt was liquidated, and an act of partnership between Pascal and Monsieur de Clairefont insured the proper working of the Great Marl-Pit. Carvajan's son, as the dormant partner, was to place a manager of his choosing at the head of the works and find the money to pay all preliminary expenses. In the future, the profits were to be equally divided between himself and the marquis, the one having given his money, the other his property. Robert, seized with a commendable zeal for work, had asked to be given something to do, and Pascal had appointed him to a post which would allow him to live in the open air, and yet turn his huge bodily strength and activity to some use.

Chassevent, summoned to Malézeau's office, after bemoaning the fate which had deprived him of his dear, good, little girl, had consented to leave the neighborhood on condition that he received two thousand francs. As the old vagabond complained of the smallness of the sum, the lawyer had said to him roughly, looking him straight in the face the while:

"A gift of two thousand francs from the marquis, and a shot fired at Monsieur Pascal makes things square. If you are not satisfied, your claim shall be settled by the Procureur of the Republic." And the rogue made no more to-do; but set off for Louviers, where he had some relations.

After giving all these explanations, Malézeau asked the marquis if he would sign a few papers.

"You will forgive me, marquis," he added, "for being in such a hurry to get all these formalities settled, but Monsieur Pascal leaves to-morrow, and so—"

"He is going away?" burst out Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice. "And where is he going?"

"I do not know, mademoiselle," replied the attorney, furiously blinking his eyes. "But I do not think Monsieur Pascal intends to leave the country."

"Oh, indeed? That's something to be thankful for at any rate!" exclaimed Aunt Isabelle, violently. "It would have been the finishing touch if he had gone back to America, to countries where it's as easy to catch yellow fever as it is a cold here! But why is he going away?"



Why has he such a mania for travelling?"

"Good gracious, mademoiselle," retorted Malézeau, "what attraction do you think there is for him here? He has broken all ties of affection with his father; he has made implacable enemies of all those who coveted part of this estate—life here would be simply unbearable. And however grieved I may be to see him go—for Madame Malézeau and I have grown to look upon him as belonging to ourselves, and we shall miss him terribly—yet I cannot dissuade him from a determination which I think both brave and wise."

"Why brave? Why wise?" asked the old maid, with a menacing expression.

The lawyer coldly drew himself up, and replied:

"There are other motives for Monsieur Pascal's departure, which I am not at liberty to disclose."

A profound silence followed these words. No one cared to continue the conversation. Robert and Croix-Mesnil were both thinking of the hidden motives Pascal could have for going away—the former with the muddled surprise of a man who has never paused to notice what is going on around him, the second, with the melancholy pity of a lover who, hopeless himself, knows his rival's suffering is as great as his own.

Antoinette, who was seated in the window in the pale rays of the November sun, had let her embroidery fall on her knees; and with idle hands and eyes half closed, seemed to doze. But she was not slumbering. She was thinking of one of the stained windows in the Clairefont church—the one on which Jacob was depicted, wrestling with the angel. She could distinctly see the painting of the Biblical shepherd, with the bronzed skin, the high forehead, the brown beard and blue eyes which formed so strong a resemblance to Pascal. This was the man, determined and intensely loving, who had been content to serve fourteen years to obtain Rachael. He had not allowed his task to dishearten him; and in the end he had overruled all resistance, and gained the woman he desired. Had not Carvajan's son displayed a similar courage, inspired by a similar love?

Antoinette thought of how he had spoken to her the first time in the lane. How careless and easy he was then! He was returning from foreign lands to his father's roof. He was finding an exquisite delight in seeing once again the fields and woods where he had passed his childhood. And suddenly he had found himself drawn into the fight, and the first name he heard was that of his



father's enemy. Even now she could hear herself saying, "I am Mademoiselle de Clairefont." How proudly he had replied: "And I am Pascal Carvajan!" Did they not seem like two enemies unfurling their flags, and entering the lists against each other? But no, they were not destined to engage in combat. The first glance had put an end to all idea of strife between them, and made him her zealous defender. After that day she had felt his presence ever near her; she knew that he was watching her joys and grief; and that, although he had no hope, yet he was attaching himself to her by the mysterious ties of a constant communion of spirits. Then came the scene at the ball, with her brother's provocations; Pascal's quivering anger; and her own intervention and apology, when, with a word, she could have made the man before whom she was humbling herself, fall at her feet; and lastly, after a fresh addition had been made to the burden of her grief, her visit to Carvajan's gloomy house. How tenderly and resolutely he had said to her: "You shall not be wounded either in your affections or your fortune. That I promise you upon my honor." And in the gladness of her heart she had replied, "You will always have my deepest gratitude." He had kept his promise. At the cost of the most heroic sacrifices, he had cleared Robert's reputation and saved the estate. And what had she done to prove her gratitude? A few tears shed, a pressure of the hand, had been all the reward she had given him.

An outburst from Aunt Isabelle aroused Mademoiselle de Clairefont from her reverie. Robert and Croix-Mesnil had taken Malézeau out on the terrace; and the old maid was talking to her brother-in-law.

"Well, my dear," she cried, fiercely, "if I were thirty years younger, you may take my word for it, I'd have managed to make him stop!"

"Come, come, auntie," said the marquis, "you are too impetuous."

"Then I serve to counterbalance those who are too phlegmatic."

"I knew the time when you were more exclusive in your ideas, and when you would not admit that a man worthy the name could exist outside the aristocracy."

"But just look how your aristocracy has behaved to us. Until that dear Pascal declared himself on our side, our neighbors De Saint-Croix and d'Edennemare would have nothing to do with us. Before this plebeian stood up in our defence, all our noble friends turned their backs



on us, while he has been most chivalrous. He is not highly born, I know; but he is of the stuff of which our old kings used to make great generals, great ministers, and finally dukes and peers."

"My dear sister, I won't attempt to contradict you. I thought I was the only liberal in the family, but now, judging from appearances, there seems to be two of us. Only don't speak so loudly. It makes my head ache—it is not very strong yet—and you will wake Antoinette."

"Is she asleep? Can it be possible, when she ought to be in a state of agitation, at least as violent as mine? And it is I who have reared that girl! She was more excited the day of the trial, I can tell you. But once the danger past, the rescuer may go to the devil!"

"Sister!"

"Well, I always say what I think. I am not one to change so easily; nothing has ever made me turn back."

"Really, I believe you love this young man better than you do us."

"And what if I did? Would it not be only just? We had done nothing for him, and he has given up everything for us. But there, I am very stupid to excite myself so—nobody has asked me for my advice, and in future I'll keep my opinions to myself."

Here Antoinette moved her head, and her aunt said no more.

"Are the others out on the terrace?" said the girl. "I am quite stiff—I will go outside for a little walk."

She rose and went slowly down the flight of stone steps. As she did so, she heard her Aunt Isabelle say to the marquis:

"You may think what you like; but it gets over me. Just see how cool and sedate she is. Either she is blind, not to see that the boy is dying of love for her, or else she is made of marble."

A quiet smile crept over Mademoiselle de Clairefont's lips; and her face lighted up like a beautiful landscape under a sudden flood of sunlight. She joined the group outside; and, taking Malézeau's arm, gradually brought Pascal's name into the conversation. The lawyer, as if he had only awaited a sign to completely unfold his friend's plans, launched forth into details. Pascal intended to settle in Paris, where he was certain beforehand very soon to gain an important position at the Palais, and where, through the influence he had with the various Law Societies, he had a practice ready made for him. He



refused to enter the Chamber for the present, but he could certainly represent La Neuville whenever he chose to present himself as a candidate. Good old Malézeau even took a mischievous pleasure in insinuating that, in the society in which he would mix, Pascal would be very likely to make a brilliant marriage. But this called forth no expression either of satisfaction or vexation from Antoinette—she displayed nothing but indifference, and her face was as calm as before. She even spoke so tranquilly that to Malézeau her tone sounded cold; and, having tried to find out too much, the lawyer learned nothing.

Pascal arrived about an hour before dinner. He looked pale and dejected, and his efforts to talk and laugh were not crowned with much success; for his melancholy would show itself. Aunt Isabelle's eyes rested pityingly on him; then shot indignant glances at her niece, who, perfectly unmoved, laughed and chatted with the utmost freedom from constraint. Several times she said to Pascal:

“La Neuville is quite near Paris. You will come and see us sometimes, will you not?”

She spoke with a light-heartedness which brought the tears to the young man's eyes. Feeling that his emotion was becoming uncontrollable, he stepped outside, where Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil joined him. Antoinette looked after them with some surprise; and, hastily rising, went to one of the windows.

Pascal and the baron walked slowly along by the flower-beds, until Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil pointed to a stone bench standing against the wall; and Pascal dropped wearily upon it. Soon their conversation became very animated, and Antoinette, seized with a vague uneasiness, turned slightly pale.

“What can they have to say to one another?” she thought.

The window of Robert's room was immediately over where the two young men were sitting, while it was screened from all view by the closed shutters—from it all that they were saying could be heard. The blood mounted to Antoinette's cheek at the thought, and her eyes gleamed with curiosity. A faint voice within her told her that it would be wrong to listen; but consumed with the desire to know, she hurried out of the drawing-room, without replying to her brother's cry of, “Where are you going?” and turned towards the turret. She ran lightly up the staircase, and opened the door of the room. The window was partly open, and scarcely daring



to breathe, she bent her ear towards the thin laths of wood, and listened eagerly to the voices which rose clear and distinct from the terrace.

"Yes, I had indeed dreamed of performing all that you have done for her," Croix-Mesnil was saying. "But though I have wildly envied you, I have never for a moment hated you. I felt that your aid was indispensable."

"Alas, all is over now!" replied Pascal, sadly. "And the one of us two that is to be envied is you, since you remain here."

"Why are you going away?" asked Croix-Mesnil, gently.

"I am going because it is beyond my strength to stay," answered Pascal, with sudden heat; "because each day adds to my love, and doubles my despair; because I know of nothing more frightful than to have dreamed of happiness, and not to have won it; because—but what is the good of telling you all this? You ought to know what I feel, since you love her as I do, and since she does not love you any more than she does me."

"It is true she does not love me," assented the baron. "But you—," he broke off with a deep sigh; then went on in a different tone; "But you, Pascal, she does love."

"What are you saying?"

"I am saying what is true, what is right, and what is just. Oh, how fortunate you are to have been able to dedicate and sacrifice yourself to her! She is a priceless treasure, and she is yours. You can take my word for it—the word of a man in love with her himself, whose penetration it is not possible to deceive, who has chosen to acquire the certainty of his misfortune, and who has suffered anguish from the knowledge of it. She loves you—she ought to love you; and she is too noble, too great, too generous, not to do so. If she did not love you, she would not be the woman she is. Come, enjoy your good fortune, and do not go. She loves you!"

Pascal pressed Croix-Mesnil's hand in his own.

"It pains me to see your grief," he said, in a tone of deep sympathy.

"No, no, you must have no regrets. What is was to be; and it would have been a thousand pities for things to have been otherwise. For a soul like hers it needed a heart like yours. You alone can make her happy, and that you will do so is my only hope and the one consolation I wish to bear away with me. That it is an unselfish hope I think I am proving to you, by speaking as I am doing."



Pascal sadly shook his head.

"Between her and me, there is a gulf," he said. "I bear the name of Carvajan—"

"You bear the name of the man she loves," returned Croix-Mesnil.

They sat in silence for some time longer, each following his own train of thought; then they rose.

"I have not announced my departure," said the baron, "but I am going away to-morrow, never to return. Let us say good-bye. I cannot wish you anything; for you have all. But you can wish me forgetfulness."

Pascal made no reply—he only stretched out his arms. Croix-Mesnil threw himself into them; and these two rivals embraced each other as if they had been brothers.

Behind the shutters, Antoinette stood still as a statue. Even after the two young men had gone she stayed, as if the sound of their voices still rang in her ears. At last she turned, looked round the darkened room in which she stood, and with a start remembered the sad day when she had shut herself up there to read the first letter from Aunt Isabelle. She could recall all her impressions, her hopes, her fears. It was on this table that she had leaned her elbows, in utter mental and physical exhaustion—there was still the trace of tears on the blotting-book. Her horizon was very threatening then; and now it was blue and sunny and clear. All had been saved within a few weeks, by the all-powerful will of a loving man. There was a vague murmur in the shadow, like the echo of past sighs; and with heartfelt gratitude Mademoiselle de Clairefont clasped her hands, and said in a low voice:

"Oh, God, how can I thank you enough!"

Then she passed her handkerchief over her face, and left the room. When she re-entered the drawing-room, Aunt Isabelle's sharp eyes noticed that Antoinette's eyelids were red as if she had been recently weeping, and the old maid felt almost glad; for she could not understand her niece's lack of emotion.

Dinner was a mournful affair that evening in spite of Robert's attempts to keep up the conversation. Everyone was occupied with his own grave thoughts, and listened but absently to what was being said. In the drawing-room afterwards, Antoinette seated herself at the piano, and for the first time Pascal heard her sing. Her voice was a pure, powerful mezzo-soprano. She chose, as if by chance, an exquisite air from the "*Reine de Saba*," and a thrill ran through Pascal as he listened to the proud, passionate expression with which she sang the refrain:



“Plus grand dans son obscurité  
Qu’un roi paré du diadème,  
Il semblait porter en lui-même  
Sa noblesse et sa majesté !”

The words were plainly addressed to him—she surrounded him with them as with a purple mantel, and decorated him with them as with a crown. For a minute, their souls were in close contact, and it seemed as if something was wafted from her to him. Then a mist swam before Pascal’s eyes; and when he was again able to see and hear, she had attacked the celebrated air: “Una voce poco fa,” with a *brio* which told too plainly her indifference, and a precision of vocalization which precluded the slightest supposition of emotion on her part.

The waves of despair seemed to close over Pascal’s head. “I am a coward to stay here only to have my heart still more lacerated every hour,” he told himself. “Monsieur de Croix-Mesnil is mistaken, and I myself am losing my reason. Come, a moment’s firmness! I will go, and let it all be forever finished!” He rose hastily, and going over to Mademoiselle de Saint-Maurice, said:

“I must beg you to excuse me, mademoiselle. I have still many preparations to make, and I fear I must say good-bye.”

“What, already?” asked the old maid. “But, at least we shall see you again to-morrow?”

“I think not,” he answered in a voice that shook; “to my great regret.”

“At what hour do you leave?”

“At two o’clock.”

“Then I shall come and say good-bye to you to-morrow morning,” cried Robert. “I shall come and lunch with you at our friend Monsieur Malézeau’s.”

“Good-bye, marquis. Good-bye, mademoiselle,” stammered Pascal.

“You must always remember to look upon Clairefont as your home,” said the marquis.

The young man bowed, but made no reply. A tide of bitterness was rising from his heart to his lips.

“Good-bye,” he repeated.

Antoinette’s hand was stretched out to him, and as he pressed it, he felt how soft and warm it was, while his own was icy cold. He glanced beseechingly at her he adored, and in her eyes he noted a gleam of tenderness and pity. The expression on her face seemed to say:

“But why don’t you venture? Fall at my feet, rave,



weep, do anything as long as you do something! Can you not guess?"

But Pascal was only angrily thinking: "If she does not make the first advance, she has more pride than affection, and then I am right in leaving her."

A farewell, which sounded like a sob, again fell from his lips. Then he took Malézeau by the arm and drew him out of the house. He did not regain his self-possession until the lawyer's gig was half-way down the hill. The chateau lights were gradually hidden by the trees, and then something seemed to break within his heart; and he knew that his love-dream was a thing of the past.

When they reached Malézeau's house, he wrung his friend's hand in silence, and went upstairs to his own room. There he gave way to a fit of utter despair. He could see nothing before him but an empty, useless existence. For whom would he henceforth struggle and work; for whose sake would he strive to gain fortune and renown? Body and soul he was under the sway of his consuming, hopeless love, and Antoinette would always and incessantly dwell in his heart and thoughts. He uttered cries of rage; he poured forth a flood of blasphemy. He cursed the day on which he had returned to this country where sorrow and misfortune awaited him. He uttered prayers and entreaties to Mademoiselle de Clairefont; then overwhelmed her with the most cruel reproaches. She had been false and ungrateful; she had bewitched him, only to work his ruin; and now he could no longer serve her, she threw him aside in disdain. Then his mood changed, and he felt ashamed of his violence and passion. He asked pardon of his idol; he accused himself of having misjudged her. She had never given him any promise; she had never encouraged his hopes and his illusions. Was he not only too fortunate to have had it in his power to sacrifice himself for her? Croix-Mesnil was even jealous of that. "No," he exclaimed amidst the silence. "You owe me nothing. I was your servant, your slave—I and all mine belonged to you—you have only disposed of your own. And the joy it has been to me to cast all at your feet has been my reward. I love you and bless you, even in the midst of the agony of which you are the cause."

Thus he passed the night in anguish and tumult of mind. When dawn came, he was a little calmer; but with daylight his torments returned; for it warned him that he had only a few hours left in which to breathe the same air as Antoinette. With a heavy heart he went down to



Malézeau's office. The lawyer was out, and Pascal wrote a few letters; then about ten o'clock he prepared to go to the Rue du Marché to say good-bye to his father, as he had promised. As he moved across the office, he caught sight of himself in a mirror, and the reflection he saw aroused a feeling of pity in him. He smiled encouragingly at the poor wretch who was staring at him with hollow, grief-stricken eyes. He felt a torpor he could not resist stealing over him; and he stood at the window which looked on to the garden, and gazed over the roofs of the neighboring houses at the Clairefont hill which sloped upwards in white, chalky masses, clothed here and there with thick, dark clumps of trees. Antoinette was now in safety on this domain. He had counterfoiled the schemes of hatred, disappointed the hopes of gain. She would be free and happy, and it was to him she would owe it all. And, at the thought, a feeling of exquisite calm stole into his heart.

"Who knows?" he told himself. "Perhaps I shall at last be able to change my love into a mere friendship, and then I can see her again in safety. Oh, to see her again—to see her again! Poltroon that I am, that is my only dream, and it is no use trying to deceive myself."

He buried his face in his hands and tried to dismiss the thoughts which were torturing him. For some minutes he remained in this attitude, listening to every sound outside and trying not to see the adorable phantom which perpetually haunted his memory. He thought he heard the front door open; then came the sound of steps, and Malézeau's voice was heard in the hall saying: "He is in my office."

Pascal felt madly agitated, and his heart beat wildly. Who could it be to see him? The door opened; and as on the memorable day when he had entered Carvajan's office, the lawyer said:

"There is a lady here who would like to speak to you."

With a cry, Pascal rushed forward. Before him stood Antoinette, dressed in the same dress and wearing the same hat as when she had come to intercede for her brother. Her face was as pale too as it had been then; but its pallor now was not caused by fear or grief. They stood for a moment, gazing at one another; she smiling; he trembling. At last she said with a charming grace of manner:

"Once again I am compelled to come to you. Only to-day it is not on behalf of my brother alone I want to plead with you—it is on behalf of all my family. You



have undertaken to insure our happiness. Well, then, I must tell you that your work is still incomplete. Robert is sad, and my aunt perfectly miserable at the thought of seeing you no more. What is there that would make you stay?" she went on with a pretty little coquettish gesture. "If you are not too exacting, perhaps we could manage to satisfy your demands."

Then, as he stood bewildered, not daring to understand, and afraid to speak, Mademoiselle de Clairefont moved a step nearer to him; and, speaking with infinite tenderness, said:

"One day you sacrificed your present and your future to me. You gave me your whole life. Will you accept mine in exchange?"

Pascal uttered a cry; the room seemed to grow dark; and he vaguely stretched out his arms. Then Antoinette's silky, perfumed hair touched his lips, a feeling of mad exhilaration took possession of him; and he was transported to a seventh heaven of delight.

\* \* \* \* \*

Pascal and his wife live in Paris, but every year they pass the summer at Clairefont. Malézeau's prophecies have come true. The young barrister has met with the most brilliant success; and, yielding to the entreaties of his friends, has presented himself as a candidate at the elections, at which, secretly aided and supported by his father, he has been elected by an overwhelming majority. Robert, now quite steadied down, works in real earnest, and there is every probability of a match between him and the eldest Mademoiselle de Saint-André. The Great Marl-Pit, in the hands of a clever manager, has become a perfect mine of wealth; and at it the marquis' consumer is used with the best results. Antoinette in her happiness has been generous enough to forgive her father-in-law the injuries he had done her family, but she never sees him, and never mentions him. When the tyrant dies, they mean to use his money to build a large home for old men at La Neuville. But at present the old fellow is in very good health, and attends to business as usual. And whenever anyone happens to speak of the wonderful prosperity of the Great Marl-Pit under Pascal's management, he nods his head, and says:

"Yes, it is all right now; but it wanted a Carvajan to set things going."

THE END.





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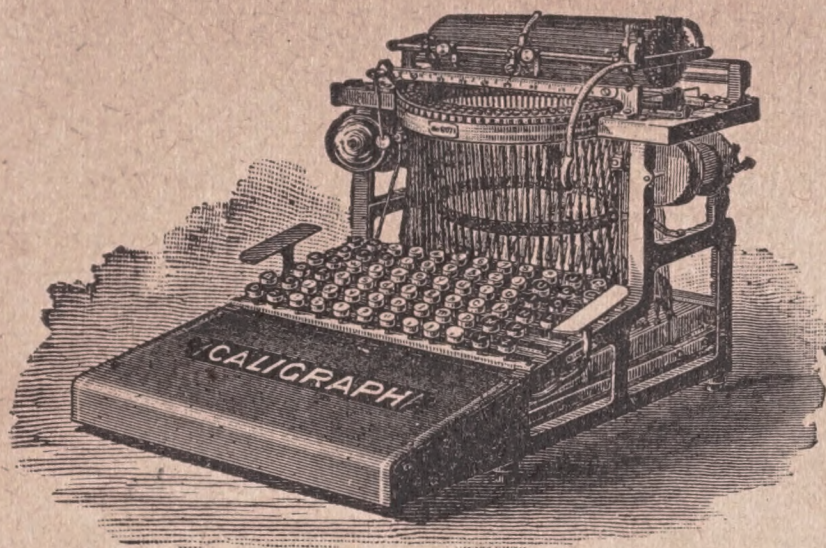
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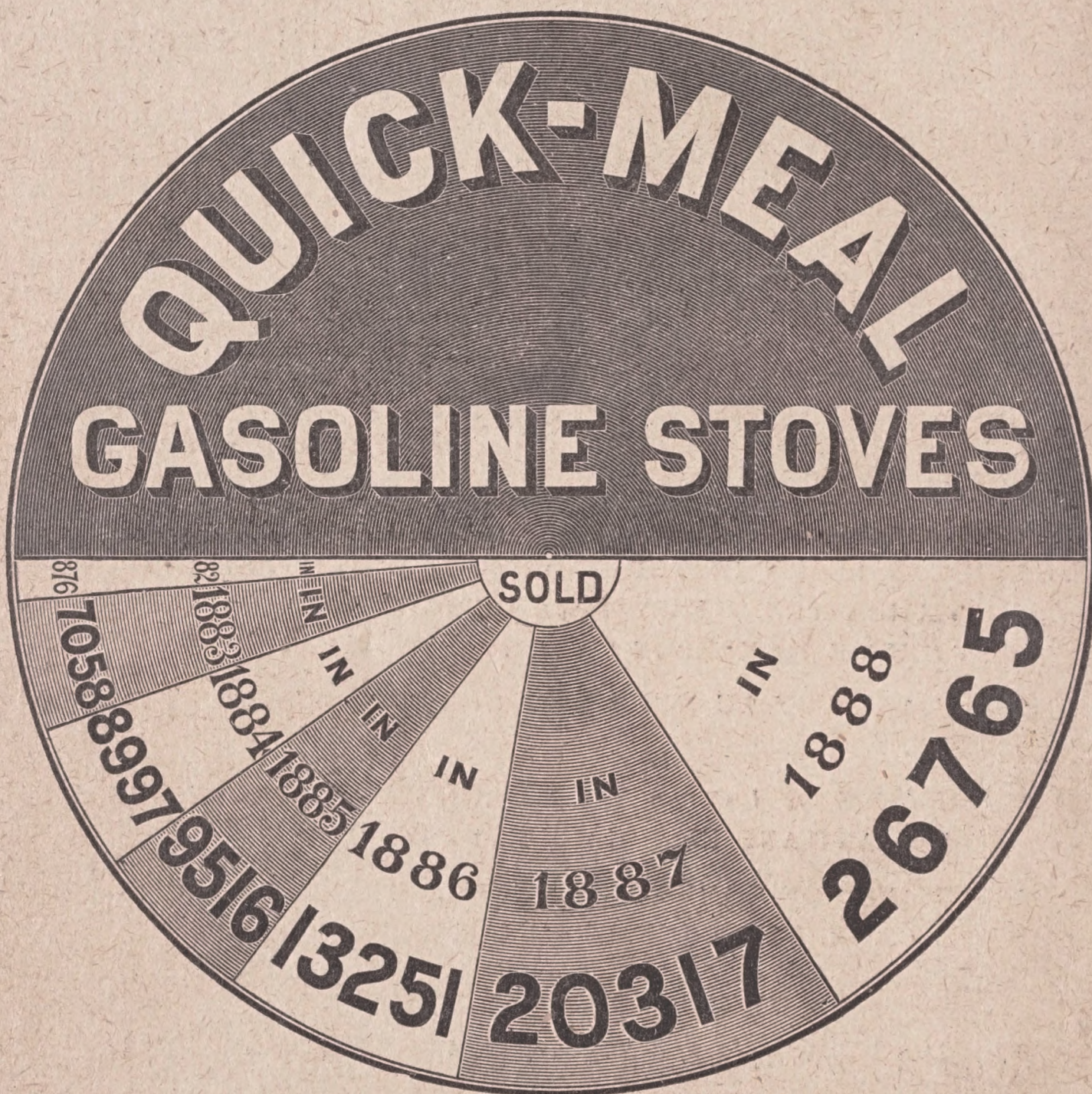
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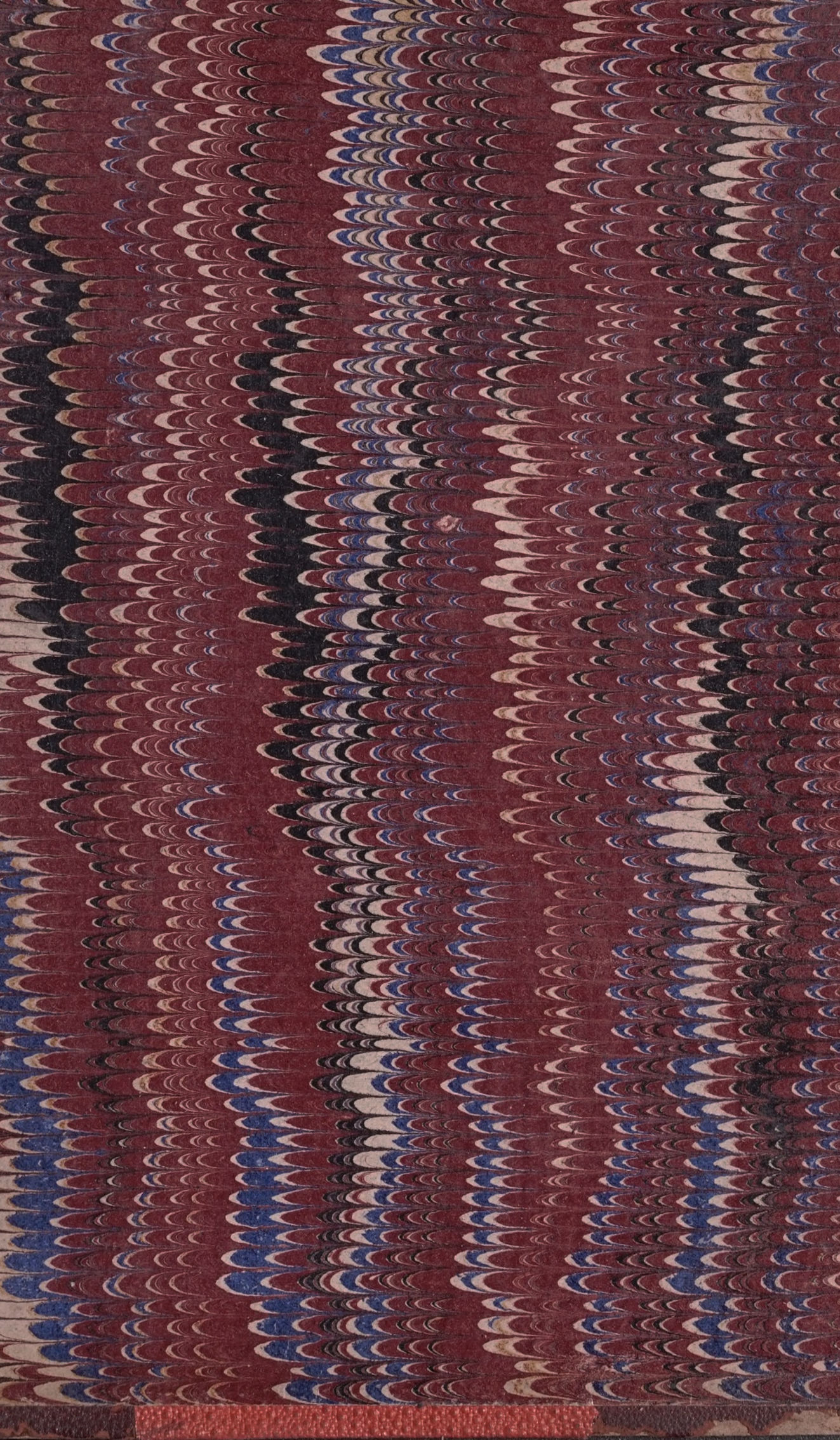














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